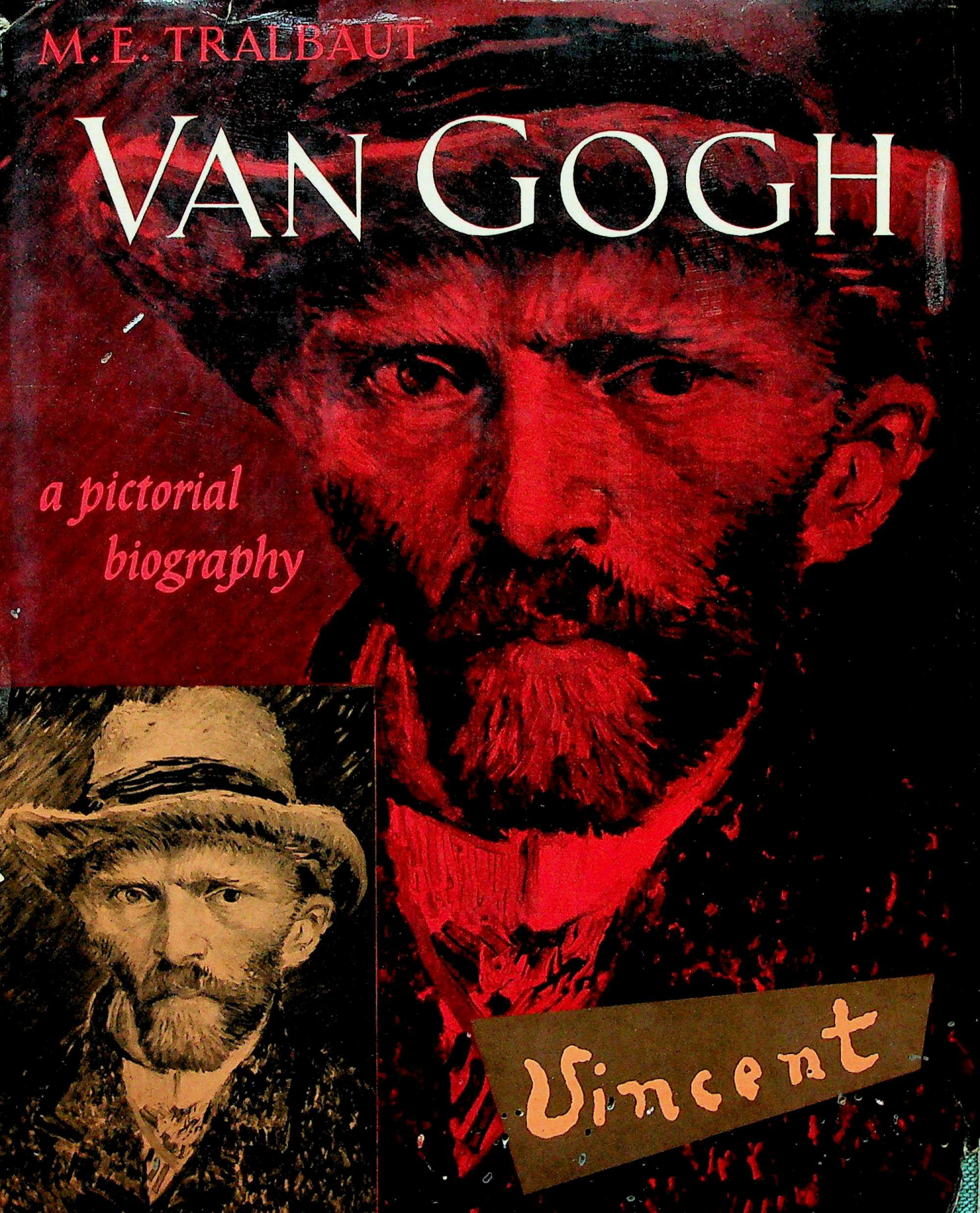
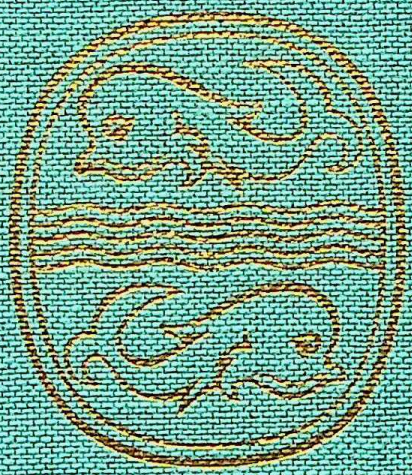
M. E. TRALBAUT

VAN GOGH

a pictorial biography





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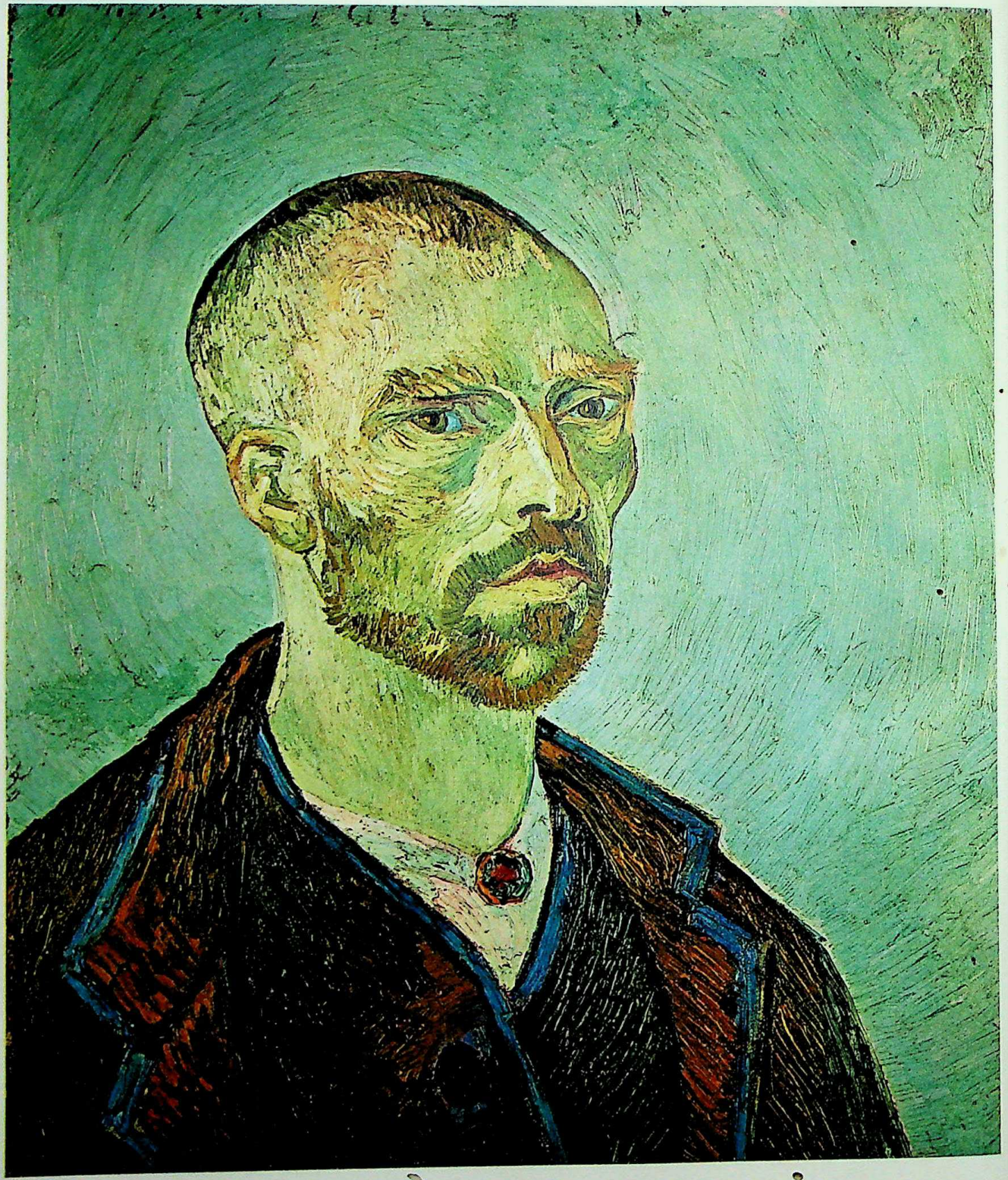

VAN GOGH

a pictorial biography

BY MARK EDO TRALBAUT

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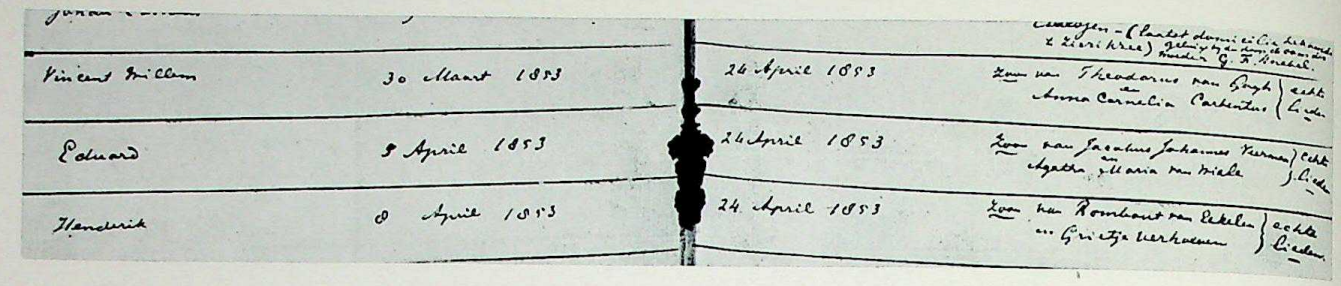
When stage-coaches still travelled the road from Paris to Amsterdam, they generally broke their journey at a little market village called Zundert, about twenty-five miles north of Antwerp, near the frontier. It was a regular stopping-place where the horses were changed and the passengers stretched their legs for a while. *Zundert*

With the coming of railways, Zundert lost even this small distinction, as it was not on the Paris-Amsterdam line, but motor travel put it back on the map. Today the main road from France to Holland runs through the town, which is once again a well-known stopping-place for travellers—now, of course, motorists and motor-cyclists. But Zundert has yet another claim to fame. In the town centre, to the right of the street opposite the picturesque Town Hall, stands a house with a small commemorative plaque. It reads: 'In this house, on March 30, 1853, was born a man whose name was to become famous throughout the whole artistic world.'

In 1849 a parson by the name of Theodorus von Gogh, then twenty-seven, moved into the house that stood on this site until it was pulled down in 1903. His father, Vincent van Gogh, who had been the incumbent of nearby Breda since 1822, inducted him into the living. From the beginning the new parson, still a bachelor, was immensely popular, as much for his pleasant appearance as for his charming ways with both his parishioners and other citizens. They called him 'the handsome parson'. Two years after he had settled in Zundert he married Anna Cornelia Carbentus, three years older than himself and a woman of outstanding talents, who wrote, drew and painted with equal facility. And eleven months after the marriage she bore him a son whom they called Vincent-Willem; unfortunately he was still-born. The little corpse was buried in the Zundert churchyard and the parents set up a tombstone over his grave. *Parents*

A year later, to the day, the Reverend van Gogh registered another birth. Strangely enough, the new baby, also called Vincent-Willem, had the same number in the parish register as his dead brother—twenty-nine. But this coincidence did little to lighten the parents' grief over their first-born, and the *Van Gogh's birth*



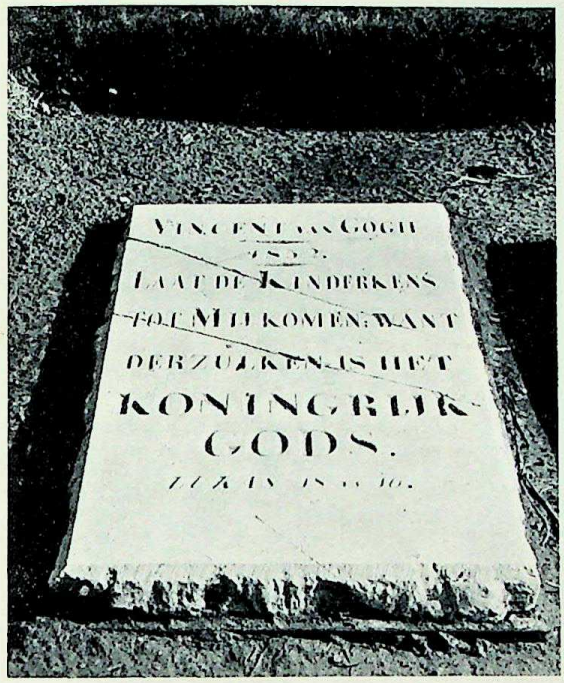
Entry in the Zundert parish register showing Vincent's name

Fate or accident?

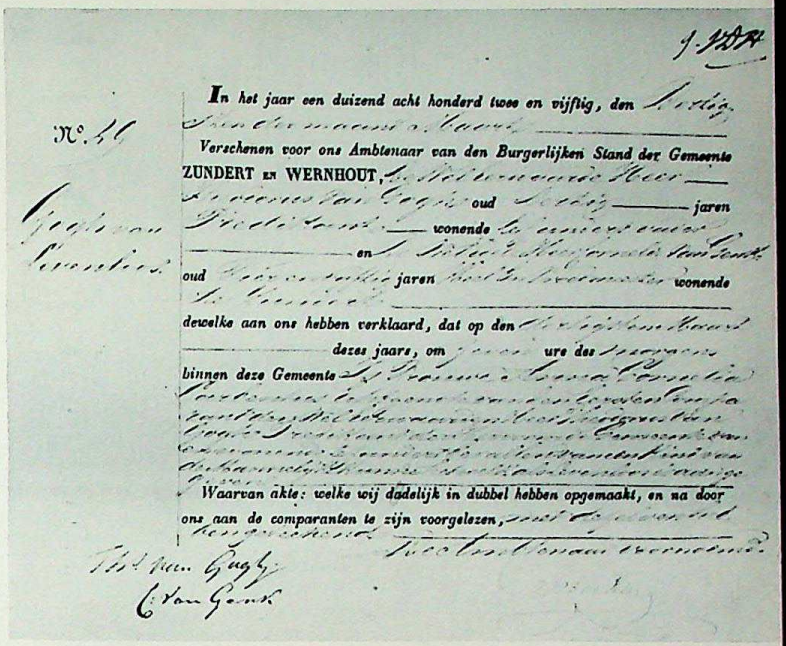
living Vincent started his life amid mourning and sorrow. One cannot help wondering whether this tragic atmosphere, particularly where his mother was concerned, did not affect the young child and lay the foundations of his later troubles.

Little is known about Vincent's early childhood. According to his younger sister, Elizabeth du Quesne-van Gogh, he stood out for his quietness and introspection. 'He was a stranger not only to his mother and sisters but to himself,' she writes. And everybody who saw the boy remarked on his 'strangeness', his 'other-worldliness'. Psychologists have made much of this. Could it have been due to the fact that the little boy was constantly confronted by his own name on a tombstone whenever he went through the churchyard? It must

The house in Zundert where Vincent was born, as it appeared before the rebuilding in 1902. Vincent was actually born on the first floor (right-hand window)



Vincent-Willem's gravestone in the Zundert graveyard. Vincent-Willem was Vincent's elder brother

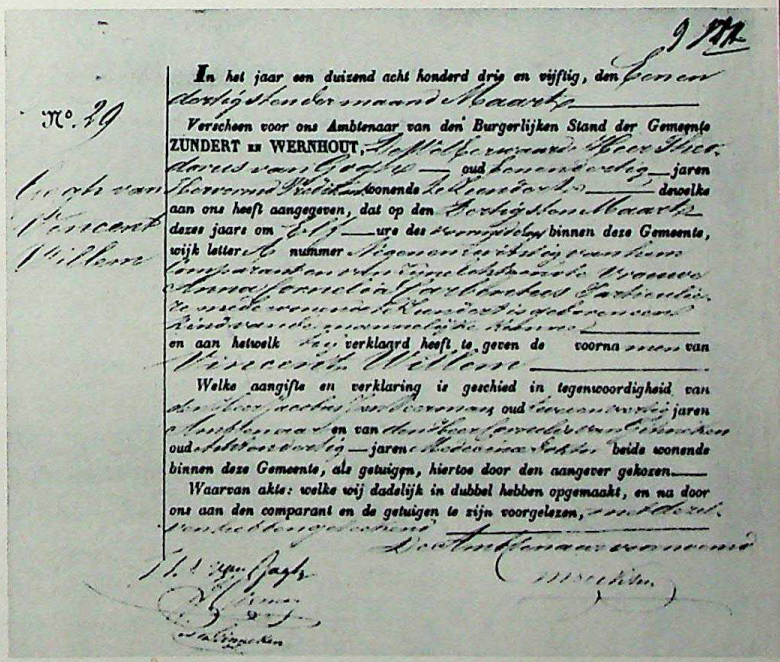


N°. 46

In het jaar een duizend acht honderd twee en vijftig, den

Verschenen voor ons Ambtenaar van den Burgerlijken Stand der Gemeente ZUNDERT en WERNHOUT,

The second Vincent-Willem van Gogh was born exactly a year later than the first, on the same day, and his birth was registered under the same number. *Above and below:* the two entries in the register



N°. 29

In het jaar een duizend acht honderd drie en vijftig, den

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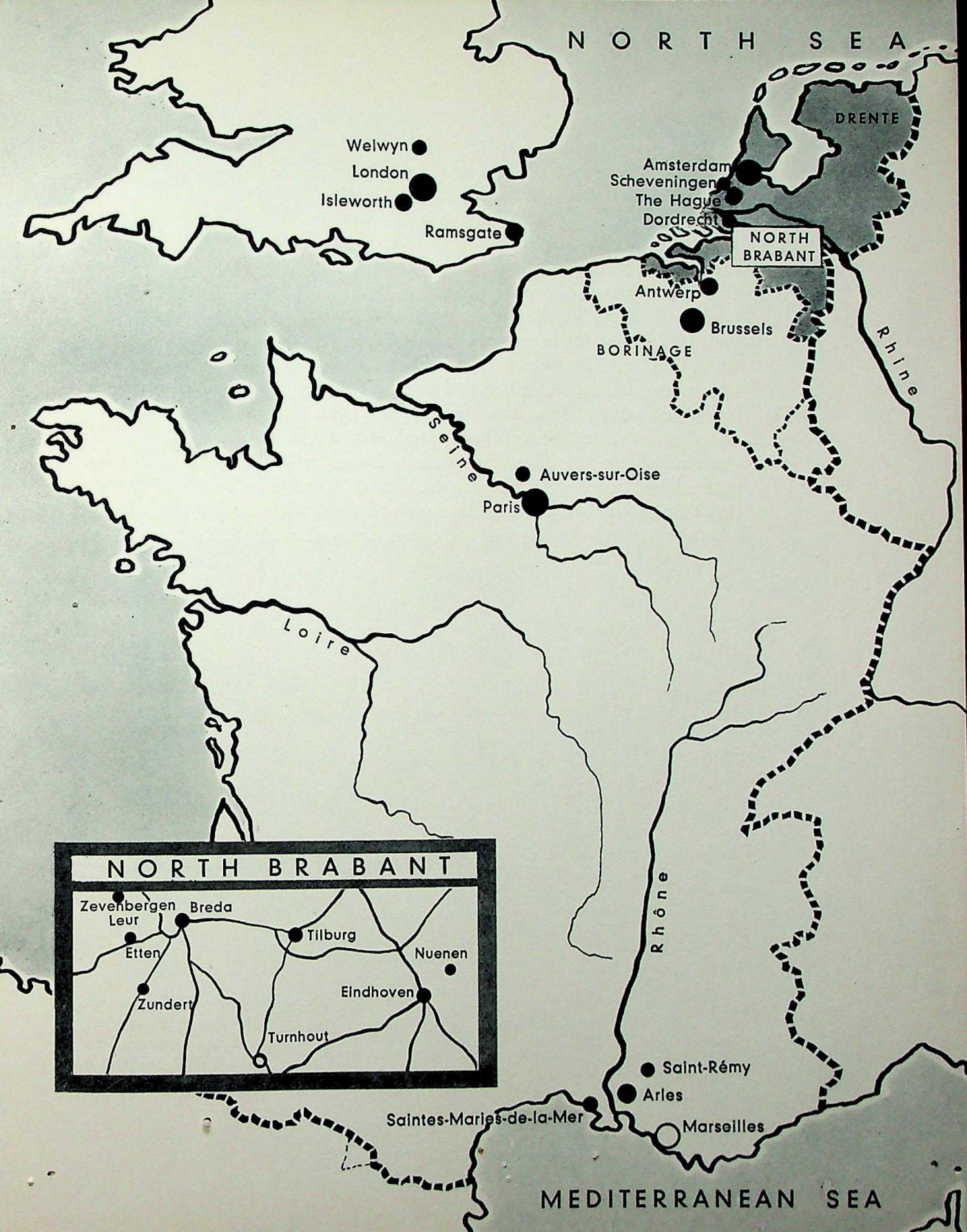
The church in Zundert in which Vincent's father preached. In the background, *right:* Vincent's brother's grave

Vincent as a child

surely have made a deep impression on him at this most impressionable age, to feel himself always, even if unconsciously, identified with his dead brother, with death itself. Perhaps it gave him a feeling of guilt, perhaps a feeling of inferiority or perhaps he felt that he was merely a substitute for his brother for whom he had to sacrifice his own happiness if necessary. One way or another, he was certainly an abnormal child and, even if his oddness can be ascribed to the beginnings of genius stirring within him, it was a genius without direction, unlike, for instance, Mozart's, which was recognized from the beginning as being a genius for music. Vincent became aware of his true bent only after he had passed through many phases of his tragic life, although even as a boy he took a great pleasure in drawing. Probably he inherited this taste from his mother, who had had a great talent for water-colour and pen and pencil sketches before her marriage. In later life he often referred, quite spontaneously, to his lifelong love of drawing in his letters to his brother Theo. But during these early years visual art was crowded out of first place by other forms of self-expression. His earliest surviving drawing shows clearly where his particular interests lay.

Places of importance in van Gogh's life ▶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DRENTE
Welwyn
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Isleworth
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Amsterdam
Scheveningen
The Hague
Dordrecht
NORTH BRABANT
Antwerp
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BORINAGE
Rhine
Seine
Auvers-sur-Oise
Paris
Loire
Rhône
Saint-Rémy
Arles
Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer
Marseilles
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
NORTH BRABANT
Zevenbergen
Leur
Breda
Tilburg
Etten
Nuenen
Eindhoven
Zundert
Turnhout

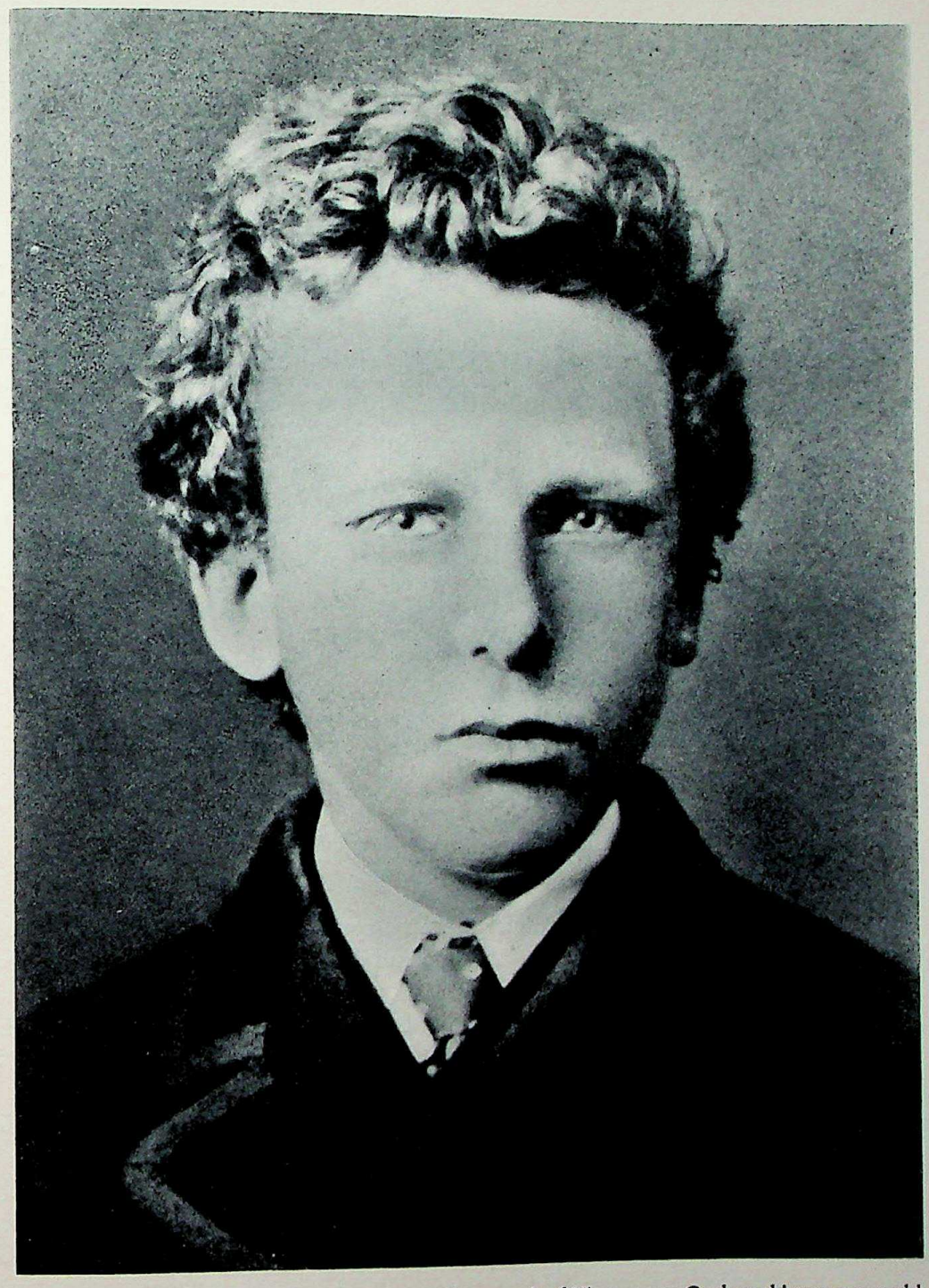
First drawings

Various elements and motifs are visible in *Farm and Waggon-Shed* which were to remain important to him until the end of his life and be continually re-introduced, as occasion offered, in his pictures and drawings.

At an age when other children are still clinging to their mothers' apron-strings Vincent had already grown apart from the family; he spent his time in the gardens, woods, meadows and fields of the neighbourhood and watched the farmers at work—sowing, ploughing, reaping. For hours he would stand fascinated, marvelling, before the wonders of nature, whether illustrated by a bud bursting into flower or by the extraordinary antics of an insect. His literary sister, Elizabeth, was not exaggerating when she wrote: 'Nature spoke to him with a thousand voices, and his soul listened.' Naturally enough, he was much alone. Few other children cared to wander around the countryside with him, sometimes as far as the Kalmhout Heath, over six miles away. Yet when, a quarter of a century later, Vincent, now far away in the South of France, yearned for home, it was chiefly for this solitary 'home' of his boyhood wanderings that he yearned. For him the words *souvenirs du nord* conjured up the whole of that early joy in seeing and experiencing, observing and remembering.

Walks

Farm and Waggon-Shed. Drawn by Vincent at the age of eleven for his father's birthday on 8 February 1864



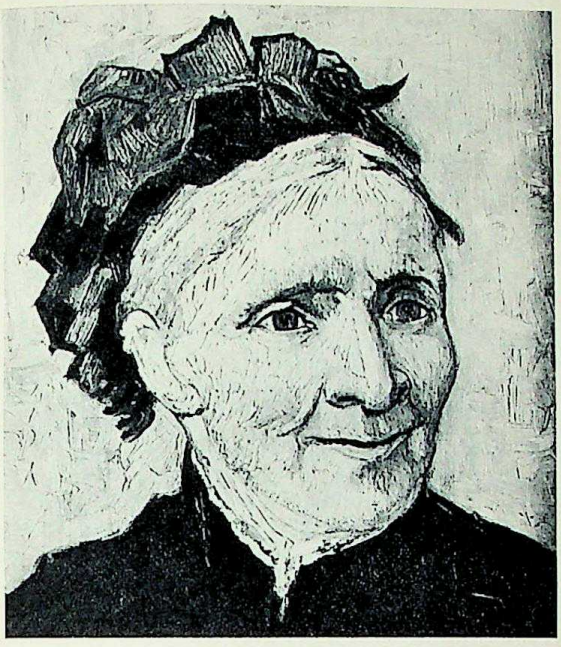
Photograph of Vincent van Gogh at thirteen years old

Vincent's mother, Anna Cornelia *née* Carbentus *(left)* was a gifted artist. *Above:* One of her water-colours of flowers dating from 1844

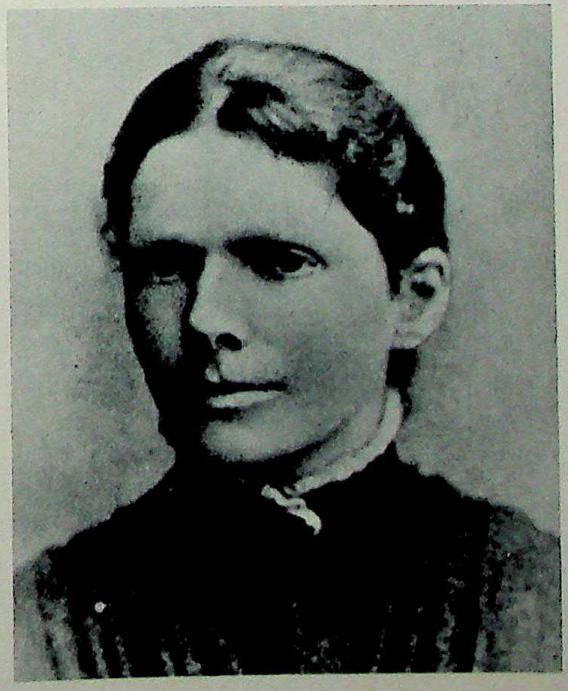
At school

In October 1864, Vincent left the village school, first for a boarding-school run by Jan Provily in Zevenbergen, and then for another Protestant school in Tilburg, staying two years in each. There is no mention in surviving school reports or other material of whether he was considered clever or unpromising, whether anyone detected genius in him at this early age; but considering how quickly and easily he later mastered foreign languages, both written and spoken, it seems safe to assume that he must have had a good educational grounding when a boy.

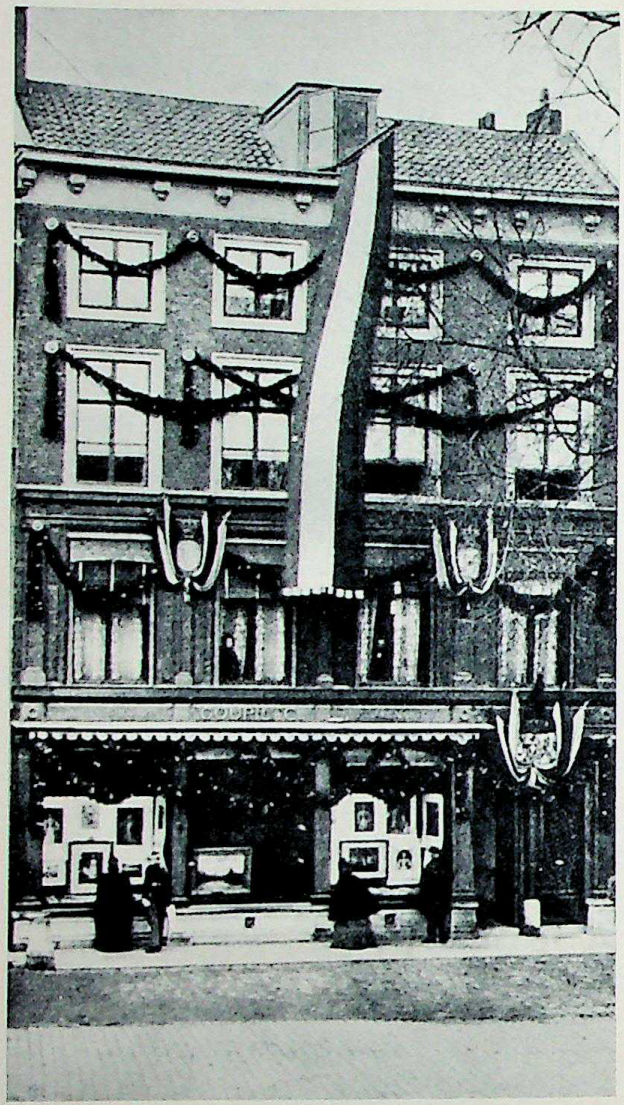
At last, in 1868, came the moment when he had to choose his career. The van Goghs followed, by tradition, one of two professions, art and the Church. In the eighteenth century there had been a sculptor called Vincent van Gogh and three other members of the family who made their names and fortunes as



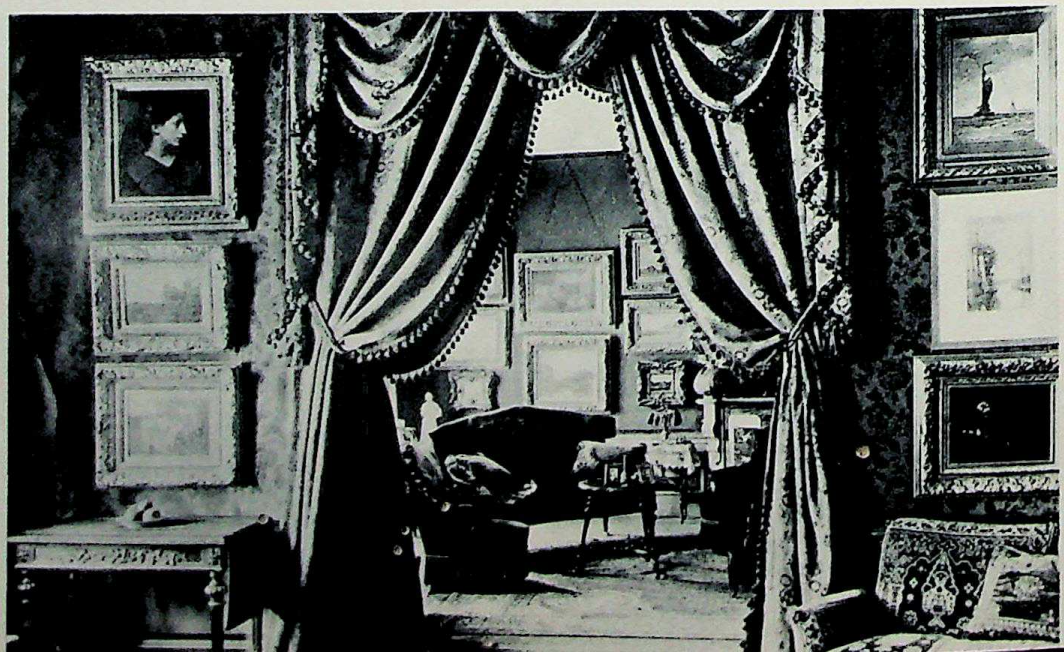
In 1881 Vincent drew portraits of both his parents. After having been for some time a missionary in a Belgian mining area, he was beginning to feel called towards painting



The painter's sister, Elizabeth van Gogh, who married a du Quesne, published her reminiscences of her brother in 1910



The premises of Goupil & Co., No. 10 Plaats, The Hague. *Below:* The interior of the shop. *Above right:* Vincent van Gogh when he was training to be an art dealer in Goupil's firm



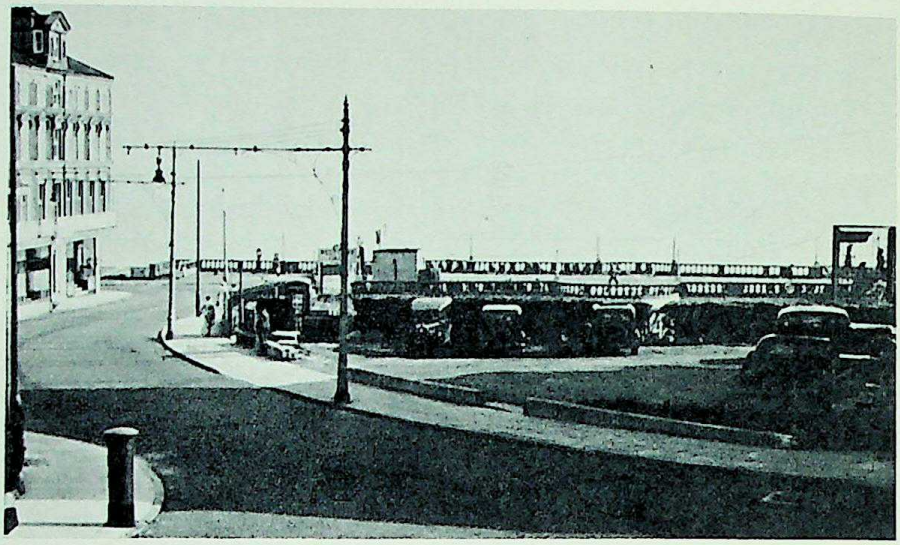
gold-wire-drawers. In the nineteenth century the family's artistic activities had turned more towards commerce. Three of the Reverend van Gogh's brothers had become art dealers and, in the end, whether he chose it himself or had it thrust upon him, Vincent was to follow this trade. At the invitation of one of his uncles, who had founded the firm, he joined the Parisian house of Goupil & Co. as its youngest employee, and went to work in its branch in The Hague.

As a young art-dealer

At first, he seemed to be doing well—so well that after four years he was promoted to the London branch of the firm and there, too, he gave satisfaction for the first few months. He lived in a family boarding-house run by a Mrs Loyer and eventually fell in love with the daughter of the house, Ursula. But when, at the end of a year, he proposed, she told him that she was already engaged and forbade any further advances. It is almost as though the shattering of this youthful dream was a prologue to the tragic drama of disappointment in which Vincent was to pass his life right up to the day when he shot himself at Auvers.

Ursula Loyer

Canal Bank in The Hague, a drawing by Vincent



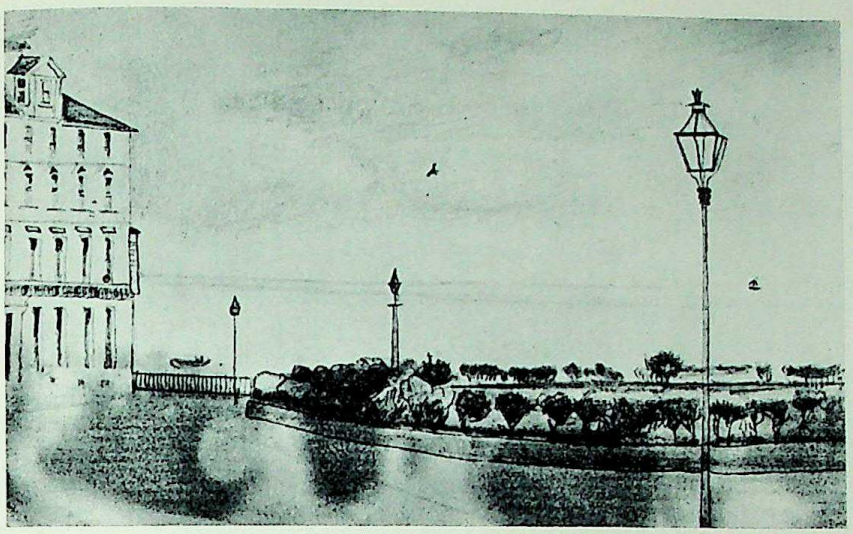
The Front at Ramsgate
A photograph . . .

His work began to suffer. He was transferred to Paris and a month later back to London again. Five months passed and he was back in Paris and giving so little satisfaction that, shortly afterwards, he was dismissed. He had hesitated to praise some pictures which he himself disliked, thereby doing credit to his artistic judgment but running counter to the firm's interests.

Teaching in England

Obsessed by Ursula Loyer, he wanted to be in England, although he knew there was no hope. He found a post as assistant to a Mr Stokes who had a school in Ramsgate. After a time he was given the task of collecting outstanding school fees in some of the poorer quarters of London, and he was horrified by the pitiful poverty and squalor he saw all around him. No chance of collecting even a small percentage of the money. When he returned empty-handed Mr Stokes 'had no further use for his services', so he set out to walk from Ramsgate to London. The first day he got as far as Canterbury. By twelve the next day he reached Chatham and towards evening he entered the London suburbs. He stayed there two days and then set off at four a.m. for Welwyn in Hertfordshire, where his elder sister, Anna, was teaching French in a girls' school. He reached there at five o'clock in the afternoon of the same day.

In reality Vincent had been dismissed from the Ramsgate school not for any defects in his character or ability but because Stokes was simply unable to pay



. . . and Vincent's drawing of the scene from his window

him. When, a little later, he moved his school to Isleworth, Vincent stayed with him for a while, and as he showed that he understood his difficulties they remained friendly. But the young man could not live on goodwill alone.

He had to find work. At this period, all his inclinations drove him in one direction. Three generations of parsons had left their mark on him. His letters —he had written regularly to his brother Theo, who worked in the Brussels branch of Goupil & Co. ever since being separated from the family four years ago—were full of deep religious feeling, and after the disappointment of Ursula's refusal he had felt more and more drawn towards the Bible and Christian studies. In fact, they were the only things that comforted him. He felt an urgent need to express these deep emotions within himself, to communicate to others what he had experienced; at the same time he had always admired his father's calling. So he became a assistant to a Methodist minister called Jones. With pride he wrote to Theo on 4 November 1876, that he had given his first sermon. 'Your brother preached for the first time last Sunday in the House of God, the place of which God said: "And in this place I will give peace." I enclose the text. May it be the first of many.'

Vincent as Methodist preacher

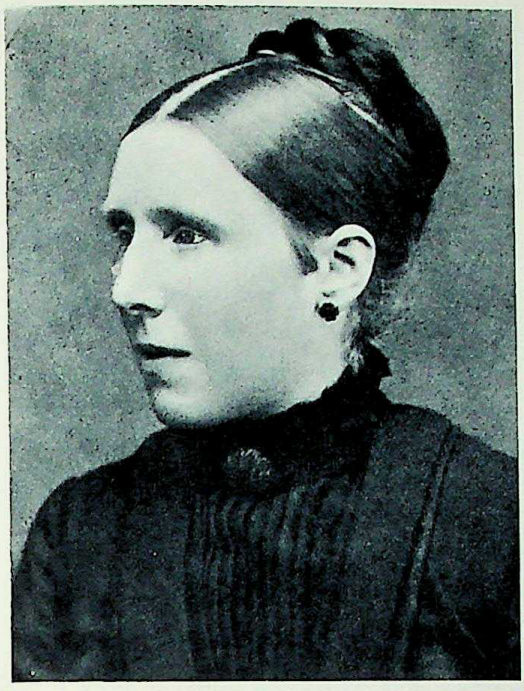
From the art shop to the church. He adopted Renan's words as his motto: 'To achieve something in life one must sacrifice oneself. . . . Man is not put in the world to be happy or even to be passively good. He must strive constantly

Mr Stokes' school in Ramsgate

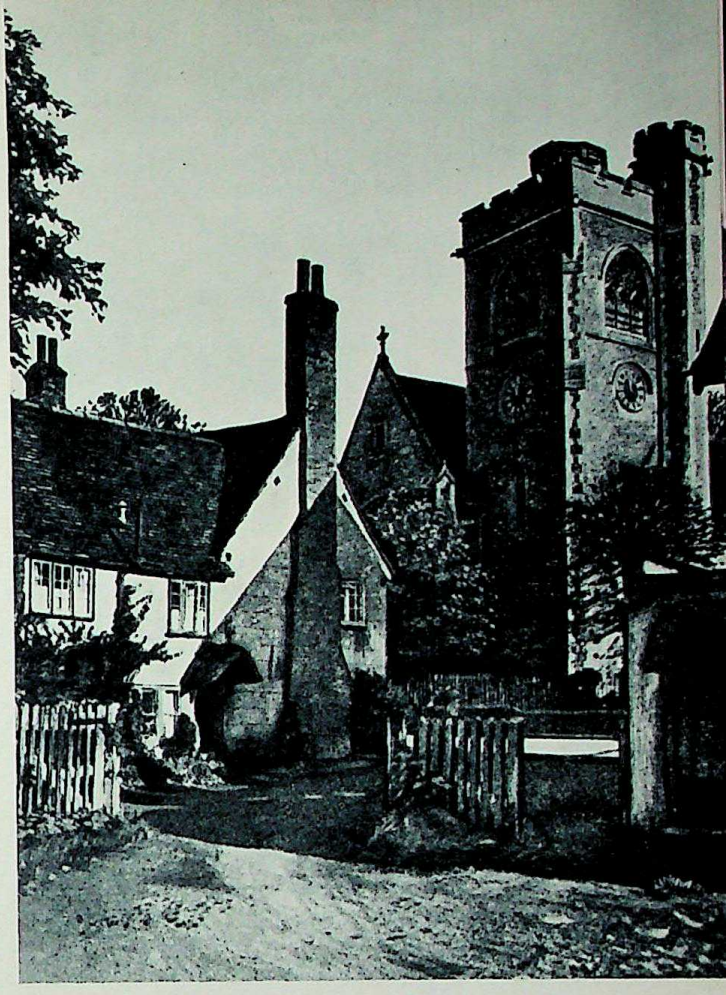
to achieve greatness for the community, to reach upwards to the sublime beyond the things of this world which so narrowly encompass the lives of most mortals.' With these words of wisdom to inspire him, Vincent thirsted to serve mankind. He had learned from his experiences as an art dealer that the commercial life gave few opportunities for service to one's neighbour. His conscience forbade him to serve those who sought only beauty, and already he was governed and led by his conscience to an unusual extent. So he followed in his father's footsteps and joined the Church.

Bible studies

It is no exaggeration to say that Vincent had devoted the last few months almost entirely to the Bible. In Paris he had preferred to spend his evenings reading the Book of Books with his friend Harry Gladwell to sharing in the



Vincent's sister, Anna



Ivy Cottage, in Welwyn

social life of the city, and he had made a duty of getting up extra early in the morning to read the Bible for a few hours before starting work. At Mr Stokes' he had often taken the boys in Scripture lessons and so from the first Mr Jones had confidence in his abilities, even though he knew he was bound to have a certain amount of difficulty with the English language.

He sent copies of his sermons to Theo. From them it is obvious that he not only was well acquainted with the Bible but managed to express his thoughts in English with wonderful facility. He was in his element, able for the first time to 'serve', in the fullest sense of the word, as he then understood it.

His brothers and sisters

To 'serve' was the highest ideal of the van Gogh-Carbentus family. Anna, the eldest sister, 'served' as a French teacher. Elizabeth 'served' the poetic muse.

The youngest girl, Wilhelmien, 'served' the organization for Women's Rights. The youngest boy, Cor, 'served' as a volunteer in the Transvaal Army, and fell while doing so. And Theo 'served' not only his brother, but a whole range of Impressionist and post-Impressionist painters who all, without exception, achieved world fame.

The letters to Theo reflect Vincent's tireless work as a preacher in the London suburbs; he was always preaching in one or other of the many suburban Protestant churches, but although this work made him very happy it did not last long. Towards the end of the year he returned to North Belgium and joined his parents at Etten, where they now lived.

Return to Holland

This was not just the usual Christmas visit like those of previous years. For one reason or another the family seems to have decided that Vincent should stay in his own country, for the time being at least. His letters are vague about the reasons—he merely says: 'For many reasons, it is better for me to go back to Holland.'

Perhaps he could not live on what Jones paid him. The fact that his uncle speedily got him a job in van Blussé and van Braam's bookshop in Dordrecht, where he received a larger salary, makes this seem likely.

Vincent remained friendly with Mr Jones, just as he had with Mr Stokes, and they met several times later on the Continent, and even if he was no longer able to be a full-time preacher he did not give up his religious interests. 'As far as the other thing is concerned, I am not giving that up. Pa's spirit is so great and all-embracing and in any case I hope that something like it may develop in me.'

This interlude in the bookshop from 21 January to 30 April 1877 did not last long. He was still haunted by the image of his father, still clinging to the memories of his days of 'service' in the Isleworth churches.

Decides to study theology

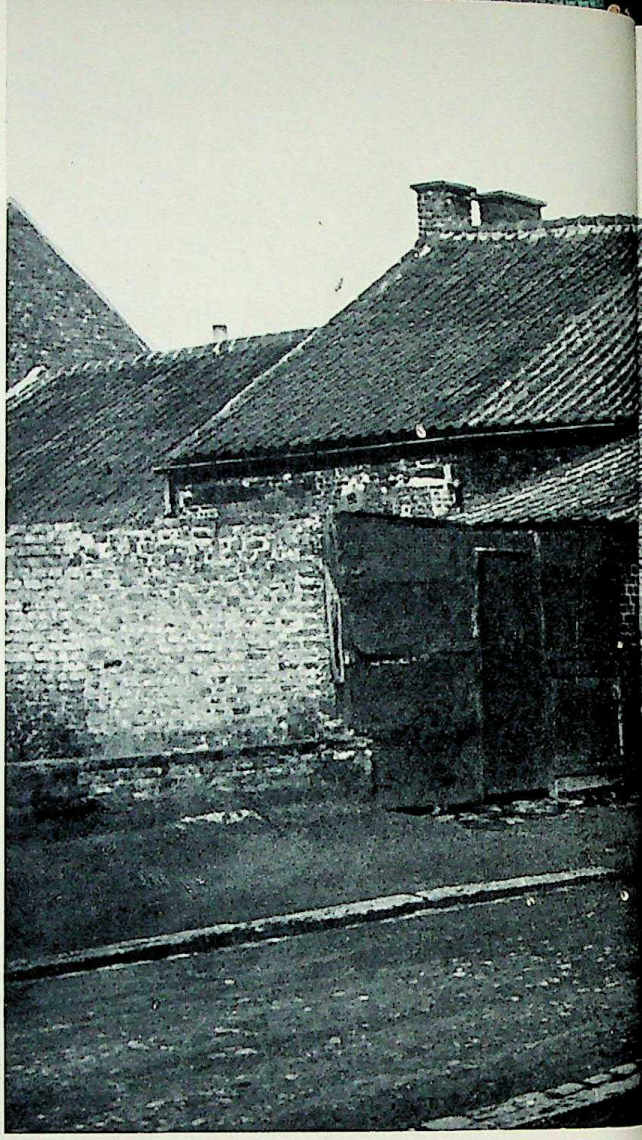
At the beginning of May he decided to give up his work and study theology, although by now he was twenty-four. To do this he had to pass the equivalent of the matriculation examination and so he took up residence with his uncle, who was Director of the Navy Yard in Amsterdam.

His parents were worried. Not unreasonably, they doubted whether he was capable of sticking to his books for the required number of years, after he had been used to a life of freedom and variety.

All went well at first. Vincent seemed determined to persevere, but then the

The Reverend Jones' church in Isleworth, near the Thames

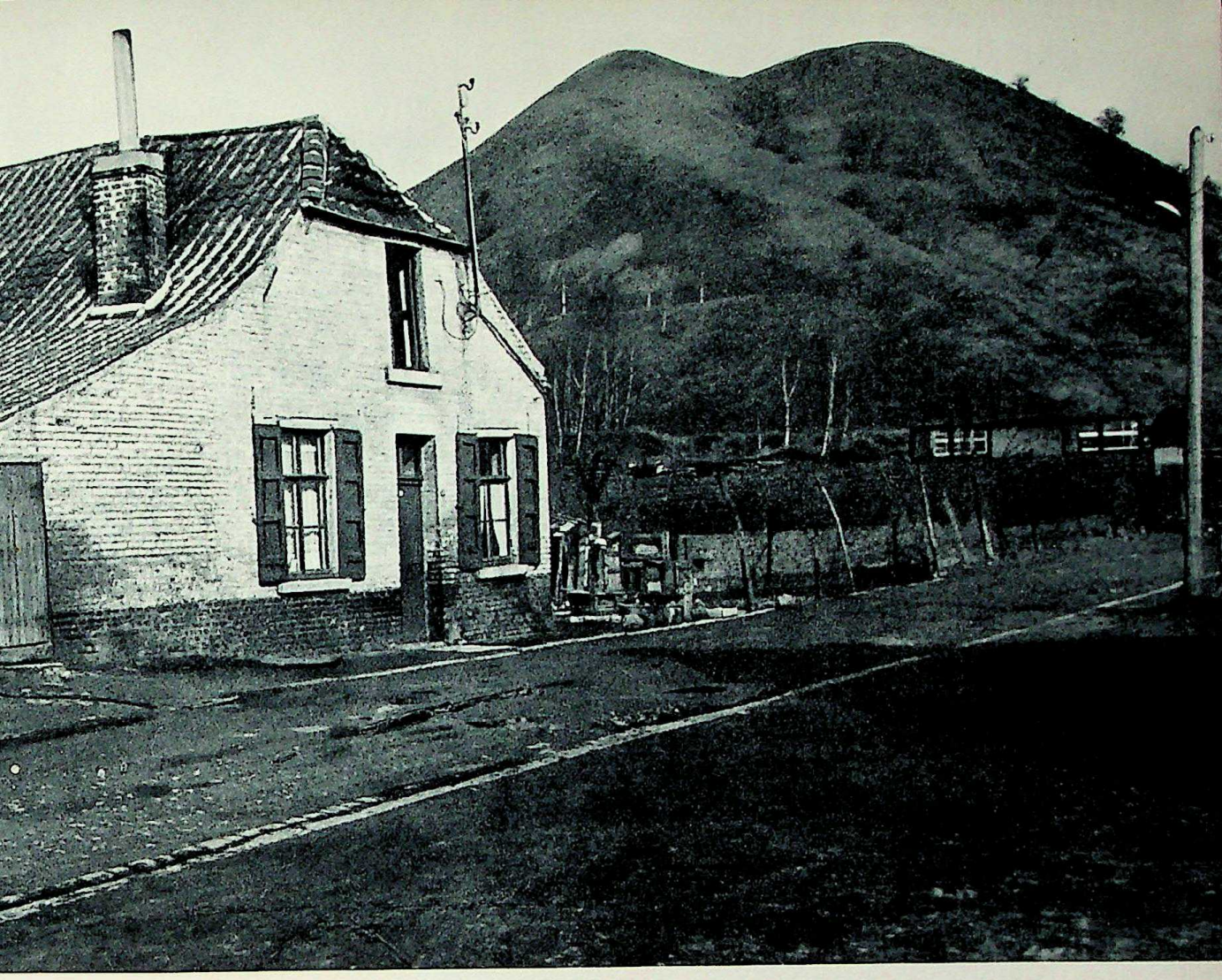
Jones' house in Isleworth



The Borinage—the mining district of Belgium. Vincent lived here from December 1878, until October 1880, preaching and doing welfare work

'serving' spirit began to disturb him again and he began to wonder whether all this Latin, Greek and mathematics would make him any better qualified to teach and practise practical Christianity.

For fourteen months he forced himself to stick to his theoretical studies; then he decided to return to a practical life. There was a school for evangelical preachers in Laeken, near Brussels, where one could qualify for a post after three months' study. Vincent gave up his Latin and Greek and went to the new school. Unfortunately, everything went wrong from the start. At the end of his probationary period he was found to be lacking in discipline and this



report so upset him that his nerves gave way and the school wrote to his father to take him away immediately.

The elder van Gogh came to the rescue once more and sent his pitifully delicate and weakened son to the Borinage, a mining district in the south of the Belgian province of Hennegau, to recuperate. Vincent lodged for thirty francs a month with a pedlar called van der Haegen, who lived at Pâturages, near Mons. The house, 39 Kirchstrasse, is no longer standing: it was demolished when the road was widened.

Preaching in the Borinage

During the day Vincent visited the sick and in the evening he gave lessons to his landlord's children. In addition to this he gave classes on the Bible. The

Visiting the sick

Brussels Committee of Church Schools also promised his father to try and find him a temporary post at their next sitting in January 1879. And so, shortly after, Vincent began on a six months' trial at Wasmes, sick-visiting, teaching Scripture, doing all the things which best suited him, at a salary of fifty francs a month. He plunged into the work, full of enthusiasm, gave away his clothes, shoes and bed to poor miners, and, considering his humble lodgings with a baker called Denis to be too luxurious, moved into a bare wooden hut, where he slept on a few handfuls of straw strewn over the bare boards.

Naturally people talked. Such utter self-abnegation had never been seen before. The inspector of the Brussels evangelical organization, the Reverend Richelieu, found his behaviour 'too good' and recommended Vincent's dismissal, which the Wasmes Church Council, who had already remonstrated several times with their eccentric incumbent, were very ready to give. Once again Vincent's father had to come to the rescue and calm his son into something like reasonableness.

Fire-damp explosion

It did not last long. There was a fire-damp explosion in the mines, strikes broke out and Vincent fell back into his 'lust for excess' as it was called. He

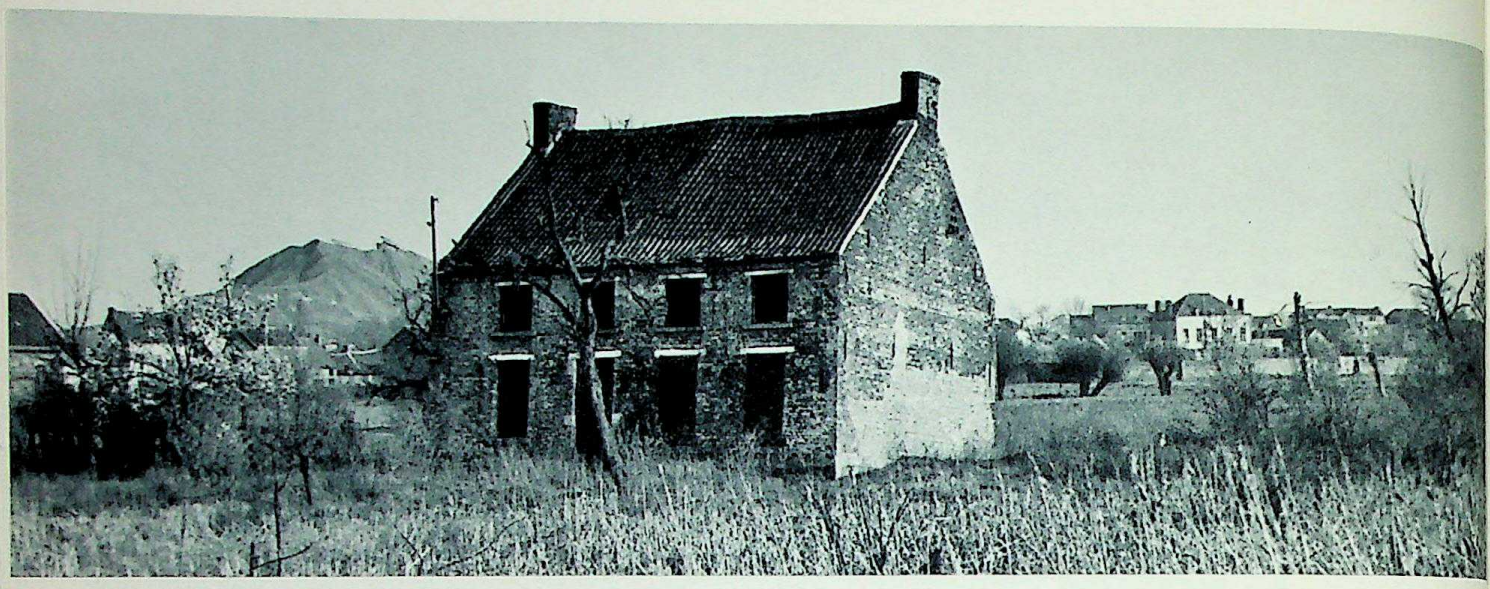
'Le Salon du Bébé' in the rue Dubois

Women Miners Carrying Sacks, drawing by Vincent, 1881

gave literally everything he had to the needy, tore up the very shirt off his own back to make bandages for those who had been wounded in the explosion.

For him religion meant nothing if it was not expressed in action. Words were no use to his stricken parishioners; they needed deeds, deeds done in the name of God's love for his children. Whatever the Church Council thought, whatever their recommendations as to the 'happy medium', his conscience was only at rest if he did the utmost that he could to help his fellow-men. In the end, the Council lost patience. They thought that the pastoral position was becoming less respected on account of Vincent's disreputable appearance. The appointment was not renewed and from now on if Vincent wanted to go on 'serving' his neighbours he would have to do it out of his own purse.

Dismissal



Decrucq's house where Vincent lived while at Cuesmes

Vincent would not have been the man that he was if he had let himself be totally discouraged by this. Instead he went to consult the Reverend Pietersen in Brussels about the situation, doing the eighty odd miles there and back on foot. He chose this particular father confessor for a particular reason. Pietersen was a keen artist, spending most of his spare time in painting and drawing, and Vincent wanted to show him some of the sketches of miners and their families which he had made in the Borinage. According to the introduction to van Gogh's letters written by Johanna van Gogh-Bonger (Theo's widow), the consultation turned as much on art as on preaching.

Vincent went on caring for the poor under his own auspices, but the breach with the Church authorities had sadly shaken his confidence in Christianity as practised on earth, and even disturbed his own faith. Gradually he came to feel that if he was not to be allowed to serve mankind as a preacher he should find some other kind of service, perhaps art.

After seeing the Reverend Pietersen he took up residence in a cottage in Cuesmes which had once belonged to an evangelical minister called Franks and was now occupied by a miner called Charles Decrucq, and his family.

It was a time of bitter doubt and uncertainty, and he spent his days wandering, troubled and alone, over the surrounding countryside.

With only ten francs in his pocket he set out—on foot, of course—for Courrières, about sixty miles away, where lived Jules Breton, a poet and painter whose work he had long admired for its simplicity and repose, but when he reached Breton's handsome new studio he dared not go in and turned back, sad at heart, for the long trudge home. He slept in the open air and in barns and ate only the bread that he managed to buy in exchange for his drawings. *Jules Breton*

This pilgrimage to France to see Breton connects up with the stimulus Vincent had received from the Reverend Pietersen in Brussels. Without admitting as much to himself, he had already grown away from the Church as a profession. Now his aims were centred on art.

Since early childhood he had always enjoyed making pictures. In London he had frequently drawn views of the Thames; in Ramsgate he had sketched the sea-front from the first-floor window of Mr Stokes' house, and in the Borinage he had spent the little free time he left himself painting large maps of

Au Charbonnage, drawing by Vincent, November 1878

Palestine. His father bought four of them for ten guilders each. Later he drew the clothes and tools of the miners. It is hardly surprising that in this darkest hour of his life, he saw in art a new way of serving mankind.

The call of art

His letter on the subject to Theo seems full of a new, invigorating feeling of freedom: 'I decided to take up my pencil and start drawing again and from that moment everything looked different.'

At last he had found his real calling after having suppressed it for so long. He began a new life. He was still 'serving' his neighbour but with art instead of religion. Or rather, art became his religion. The wrong turnings which had so often side-tracked him before were all over. At twenty-seven, he got out on to the main road.

But even if Vincent had finally made up his mind that he was to concentrate on art, he had no illusions about the financial side of his affairs. He had no right to ask his father for more tuition fees or money in any form; in other words, he had to stand on his own feet. With a view to qualifying himself as quickly as possible for magazine work which would pay for the necessities of life, he started to teach himself the Bargues drawing technique, specially created for self-tuition.

He could not study really hard in a corner of the Decrucq living-room, and so in October 1880 he moved to Brussels, where he met the young painter, van Rappard, but after a few months he felt that Brussels was not the right place for him either and sought refuge once again in his parents' house at Etten.

Brussels

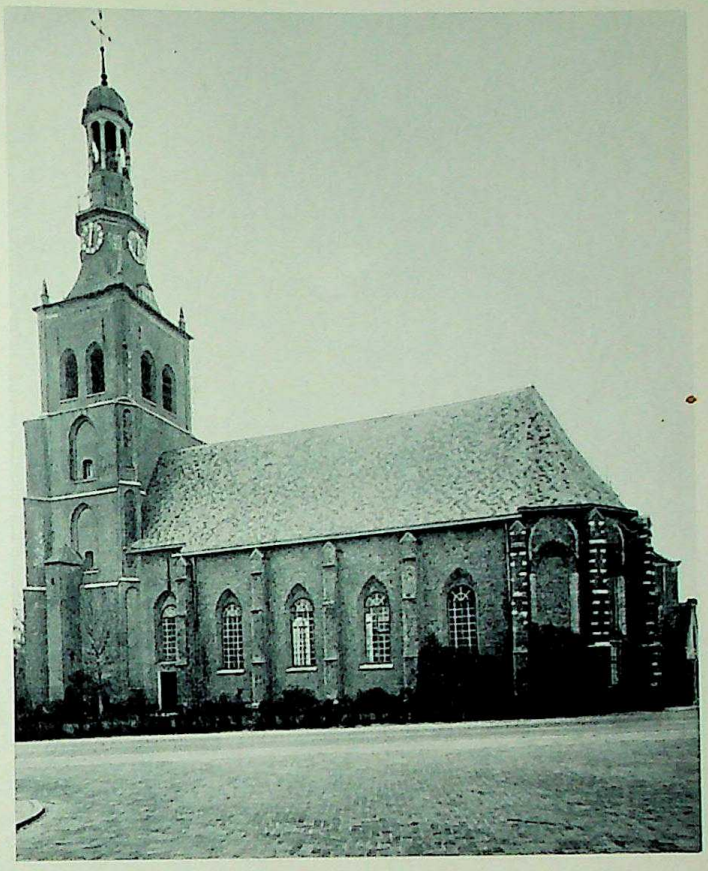
Etten was always a refuge in time of trouble—a place to escape to. It was Etten he turned to after being dismissed from Goupil & Co. in 1876, after he had left Mr Jones in Isleworth in 1877, when he had given up working for the University entrance in 1878 and when he was dismissed from his missionary work in Laeken.

Etten was about seven miles from Zundert, in the familiar region where he had spent his childhood. Not that he had not got on very well with the miners of the Borinage, but here he felt completely at home and secure enough to venture on a new type of work. He began to draw and paint more from nature and living models, instead of copying Bargues and Millet, as he had done in his cramped little bedroom at Cuesmes, though keeping Bargues' manual of tuition by him. All the same, the knowledge of anatomy and perspective that he had gained through studying others came in very useful, and the familiar life of the familiar country round Etten moved him deeply.

Return to Etten

He roamed about the countryside even more than before. His visits to Etten had always been filled with these exploratory pilgrimages; three years earlier he had co-operated with his brother, Cor, in making a map of the region. Cor

The Reverend Theodorus von Gogh



The Protestant church at Etten

did the cartography and he had added a small landscape in the top left-hand corner.

Van Rappard came to stay with him in the summer and the two of them took many long and absorbing walks together. '. . . And our walks to Seppen, Passievaart and Liesbosch!' wrote van Rappard later to Vincent's mother. 'My sketchbooks bring them all back.' Vincent was unprecedentedly happy and the improvement that his drawings show over those of Cuesmes and Brussels is unmistakable.

Laborious self-tuition

But Vincent's late start as an artist had its disadvantages. Intellectually and spiritually it made him much more advanced than the usual beginner, but it also gave him a much higher conception of the aims of art and forced him into attempts which were far beyond his technical ability at that time. Often enough technical perfection had to be sacrificed to the expression of his inner tension, so that his artistic development cannot be neatly classified according to dates.

From day to day the level of his work altered, according to the subject he was dealing with. And then there were the mistakes and weaknesses that were due purely to lack of experience. Vincent was perfectly well aware of them and mentioned them often in his letters to Theo. It was some time before he was fully master of his material.

It seems inevitable that as soon as Vincent was happily embarked on a period of calm, storms should appear on the horizon. That was the pattern of his life—hope and despair, peace and anxiety in unceasing alternation, as predictable as the rise and fall of the two ends of a see-saw. These peaceful months at Etten were no exception; they ended in the usual melodrama.

Vincent's mother's elder sister had also married a parson, the Reverend Stricker, a man well known and much respected in Amsterdam; he had recommended his nephew to Dr Mendes de Costa, a famous classicist, when Vincent was studying for the University entrance examination. Moreover, he had a daughter called Kee, who had recently lost her husband after being married for only a few years.

Kee Vos

The young widow and her four-year-old son spent the summer with Vincent's parents, in an effort to get over her grief. The three of them—Vincent, Kee and the boy, for Vincent liked children and was liked by them—made several excursions into the surrounding district and enjoyed themselves a great deal, despite Kee's mourning, and Vincent drew Kee's portrait, although it appears to have been lost.

Then suddenly the light-hearted pleasure and jollity came to an end. He declared his love to Kee and she answered in the most conclusive way possible by leaving straight away for Amsterdam and refusing to see Vincent under any circumstances.

The affair with Ursula Loyer seven years ago had taught him nothing. Once again he tried desperately to change an unalterable 'no' into 'yes'; once again he struggled desperately with a sinister passion which seemed to transform his entire mentality.

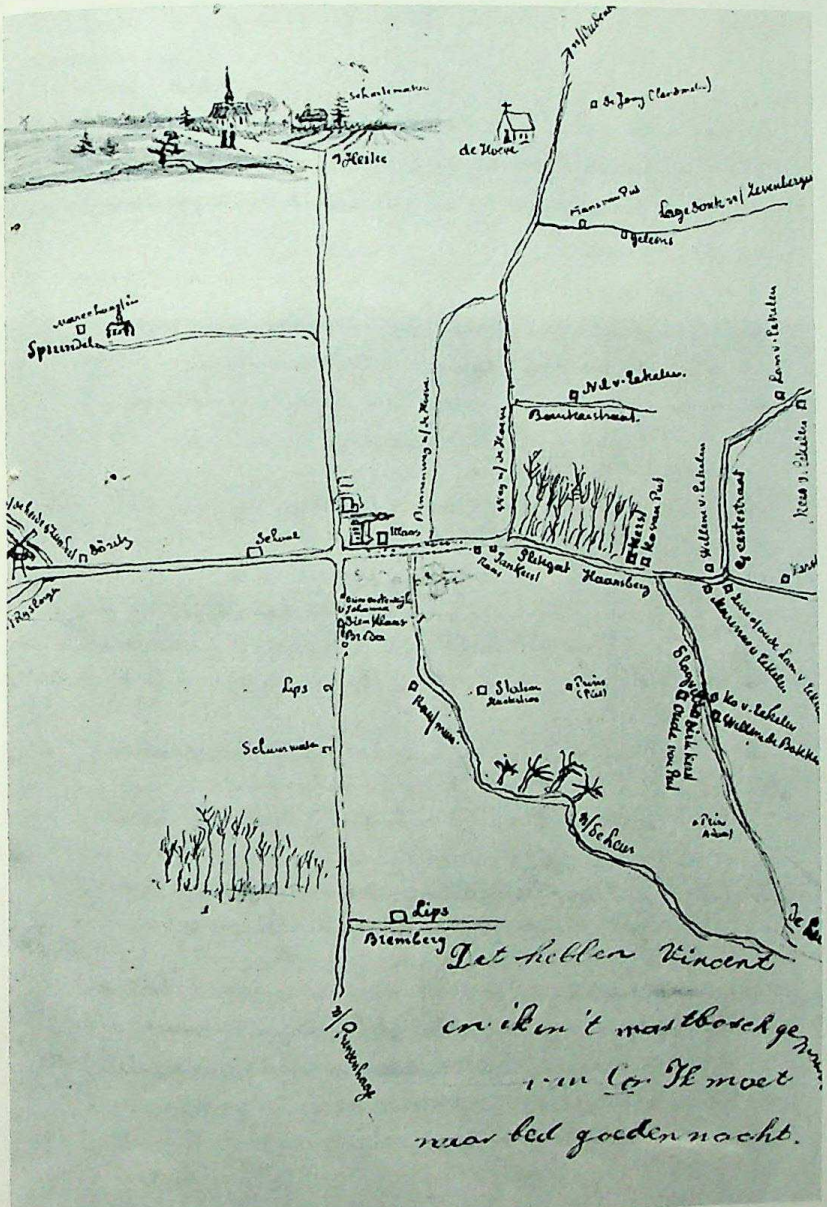
'I held my fingers in the flame . . .'

He went to Amsterdam and insisted on seeing Kee. 'I held my fingers in the flame of the lamp,' he wrote to Theo a year later, 'and said: "Let me see her for as long as I can hold my hand in this flame", but they put out the lamp.' So ended his second experience of love. It gives us a clue as to the almost suicidal character of Vincent's passions; emotionally, too, he was 'different'.

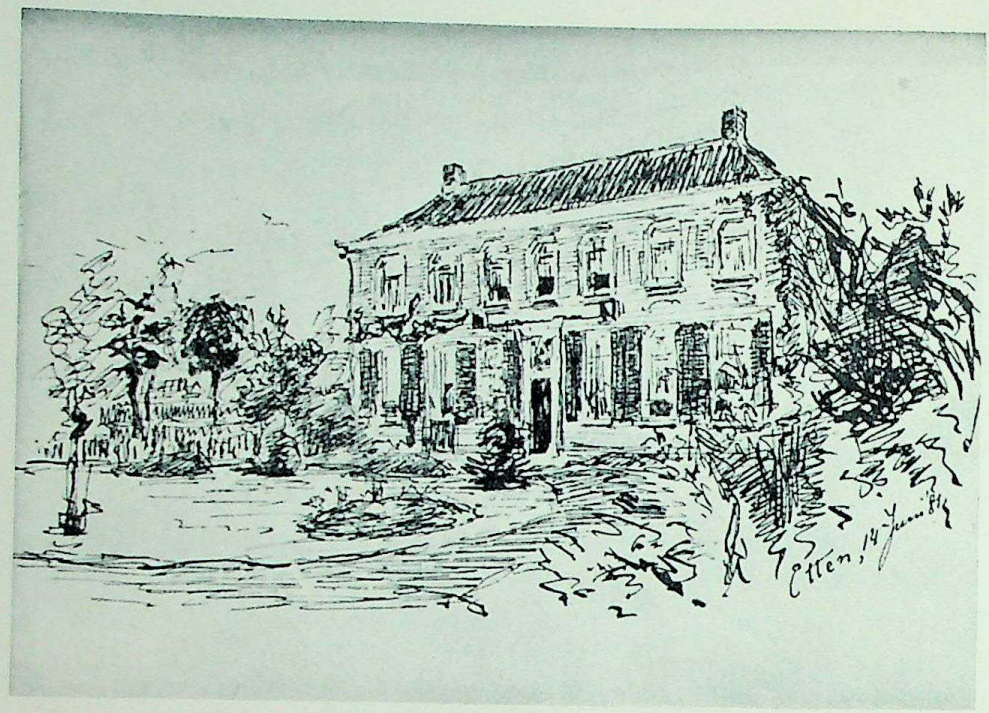
This fiasco was not exactly calculated to improve Vincent's spirits. After the religious upheaval caused by his experiences in the Borinage this new disappointment made him feel as though God had entirely deserted him.

Christmas always seemed to mark the high point of Vincent's crises; so much

Vincent's brother
Cor van Gogh, at 17



Etten and District,
drawn jointly by
Vincent and Cor van Gogh



The Rectory in Etten, drawn by Vincent in 1881

so that 25 December had become a dreaded day for him. On this particular Christmas Day he was involved in a fierce quarrel with his father as to whether anyone should be forced to go to church. It ended in Vincent's leaving the house before New Year and going to The Hague.

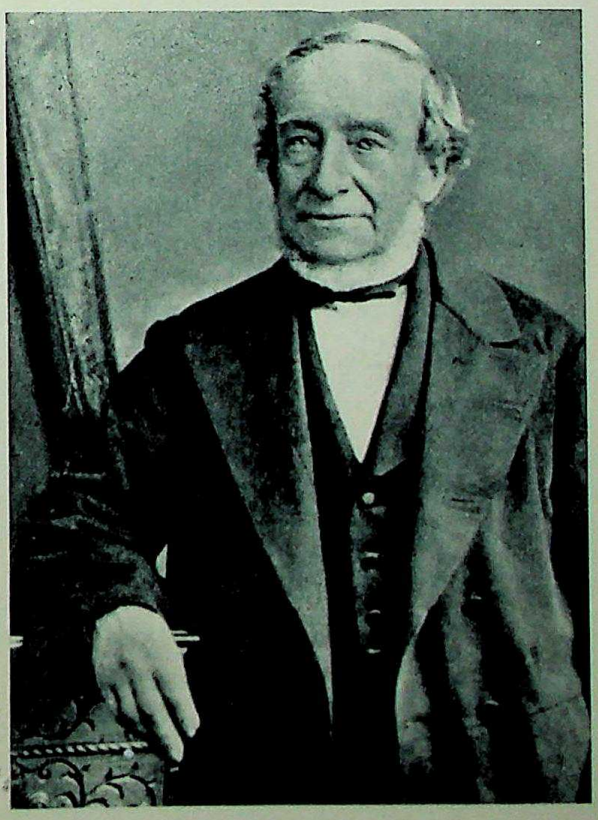
There was another reason for his going to The Hague. In it lived his cousin, the painter Mauve. He was anxious to get know him and ask his advice and help about art. In The Hague he also met and became friendly with Weissenbruch, Breitner and van der Weele.

As far as his artistic development was concerned, the disappointment of Kee's refusal did him little harm. Grieved as he was, he still kept his appetite for work. In fact, the affair probably grew out of its original frustration to form a new source of artistic inspiration.

From this time he devoted his entire concentration to his work and lived for it alone. Ten months later he confided to Theo: 'I felt this love *dying* [his italics], not all in a minute but fast enough, and in its place there was only emptiness, endless emptiness!' And a few lines lower down: '. . . I threw myself with all my strength into my work.'

Kee Vos-Stricker with her son

The Reverend Stricker, Vincent's uncle



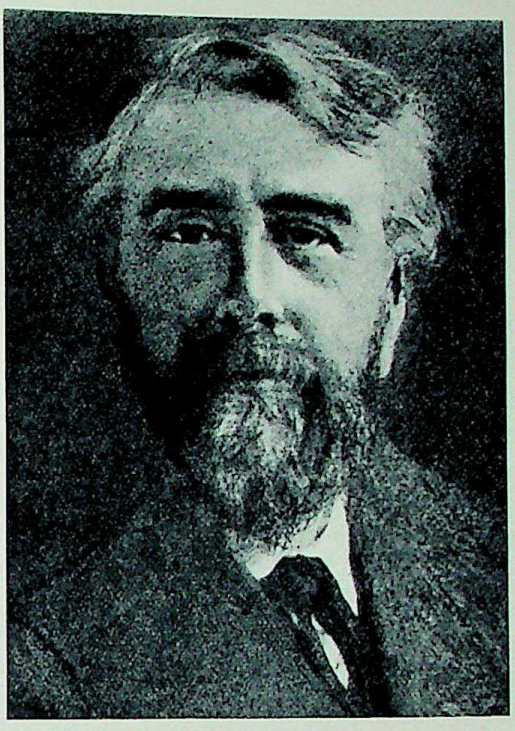
J. H. Weissenbruch, the painter
(1824–1903)

It was at this time that he experienced what all self-taught people experience at one time or another. He felt a sudden need for certainty, for confirmation from outside of his own belief in himself, for guidance from another artist, preferably one with a good reputation and wide experience. Even a 'beginner' like himself, such as van Rappard, was better than nobody.

Studies with Mauve

But, best of all, there was a real painter in the Carbentus family—a man who was already fairly well known as a member of The Hague School. This man, Anton Mauve, became Vincent's teacher. But Vincent was not a good pupil. His virtues and defects were already too firmly founded for his character—artistic or otherwise—to be moulded by another. After so many years of thinking about art, its meaning and its aims, he knew exactly what he wanted to do even if he was not yet technically able to do it.

Georg Hendrik Breitner, the painter (1857–1923)



Vincent's cousin, Anton Mauve, the painter (1838–88)

Mauve, following in the old traditions of art teaching, would not let him draw anything but plaster casts of various objects; he was forced to suppress his own ideas about form completely. Naturally the two of them found themselves in almost constant disagreement and in the end they had to part. The gap that this rupture left in Vincent's life would have been even wider if he had not already become acquainted with other painters.

Fellow-painters in the Hague

Only a few weeks after his arrival in The Hague—he wrote about it at the beginning of February 1882—he had met the young artist Breitner, and for a little while the two of them spent much time together in public houses and waiting-rooms, sketching all different kinds of people. Some of their work, *The Supper* and *The Volksküche*, for instance, shows how much they had in common at this period although Breitner, himself to become an accomplished artist, had no idea of Vincent's genius, and shortly afterwards went his own way.

Vincent had admired Weissenbruch's work as long ago as the first years of his initiation into the art trade. Now, thirteen years later, the two men built up a real mutual understanding. They soon took to visiting each other's studios. The older man became a sort of fatherly adviser who could appreciate the real value and direction of Vincent's efforts, and the younger, fired by praise from his old friend, gave him encouragement and hero-worship in return.

And towards the end of the year he made friends with van der Weele, another companionable painter, as well.

Sien

But in the meanwhile he had involved himself in yet another scandal. In the town one day he met a woman who smelt strongly of liquor and was clearly following the oldest profession in the world. About her he later wrote to Theo: 'She had to earn her living—you can guess how.'

She was faded, pock-marked, old and pregnant. Full of pity, Vincent took her under his protection, sketched her, shared his own dry bread with her and her children and even thought of marrying her to save her from hunger and cold.

A parson's son living with a prostitute! It is not hard to imagine the feelings of the respectable van Gogh family; but Vincent, the pure to whom all things were pure, kind, sympathetic, incapable of evil-mindedness, saw nothing wrong in what he was doing. On the contrary, he did not see what else he could have done. Was it not the duty of a Christian to raise the fallen and set the strayed sheep back in their path?

'I think,' he wrote in a letter to Theo, 'that any man worth his salt would have done just the same in the same circumstances.' And he took great pains to make Sien, as the woman was called, and her children happy and to create for them a new and better life.

His great desire to have a family of his own, to be surrounded by his own wife and children, to find in them an outlet for all the tenderness in his heart, was satisfied for a while—even though in a rather unorthodox fashion.

The dreams which first Ursula Loyer and then Kee Vos had shattered seemed to be turning at last into reality and, apart from this, his care of Sien, a repentant sinner, also satisfied his desire to 'serve'. In helping her and her children he was serving not only his neighbour but all mankind.

There is something about the whole episode which is reminiscent of the scene in Dostoievsky's *Crime and Punishment*, where Raskolnikov knells at Sonia's feet and cries out: 'In kneeling here, I am kneeling not before you but before the whole of suffering mankind.'

But, to be fair, the giving was not all on Vincent's side. Sien did her share by sitting to him often as a model, sometimes with her children. Despite their coarse form and rough technique these drawings already show the strong

Woman (Sien) and Child

feeling which was to mark out Vincent's later work. If, for instance, Rembrandt's painting of a dead woman is outstanding in its virtuosity, Vincent's study of the same subject, painted from Sien, bears comparison with it for power and tension, and his *Sorrow*, praised by Weissenbruch, also has its merits.

He worked from early morning until far into the night, driven by an almost demonic energy, and the fruits of his efforts were a large number of drawings, often technically faulty but always pungently expressed. He kept up this pace for months.

The first picture in colour

In August 1882 he suddenly took to painting in colour. His first paintings show traces of his laborious struggle with the medium, but their high quality is amazing. *The Beach at Scheveningen* (The Dr Ribbius Pelletier Collection, on loan to the Amsterdam City Museum) dates from this early period. It shows that Vincent could have had a brilliant success, even if he had been content to remain a worthy follower of The Hague School, but he was never content with safe traditionalism. He had made up his mind to carve his own way through life, even if it meant blood, tears, sweat, hunger and solitude.

When he was getting on so well, he suddenly received a blow from the quarter one would least expect, from the ungrateful Sien for whom he had sacrificed everything, for whom he had spent most of the money which Theo had been sending him regularly since he had joined the Paris branch of Goupil & Co.

Parting from Sien

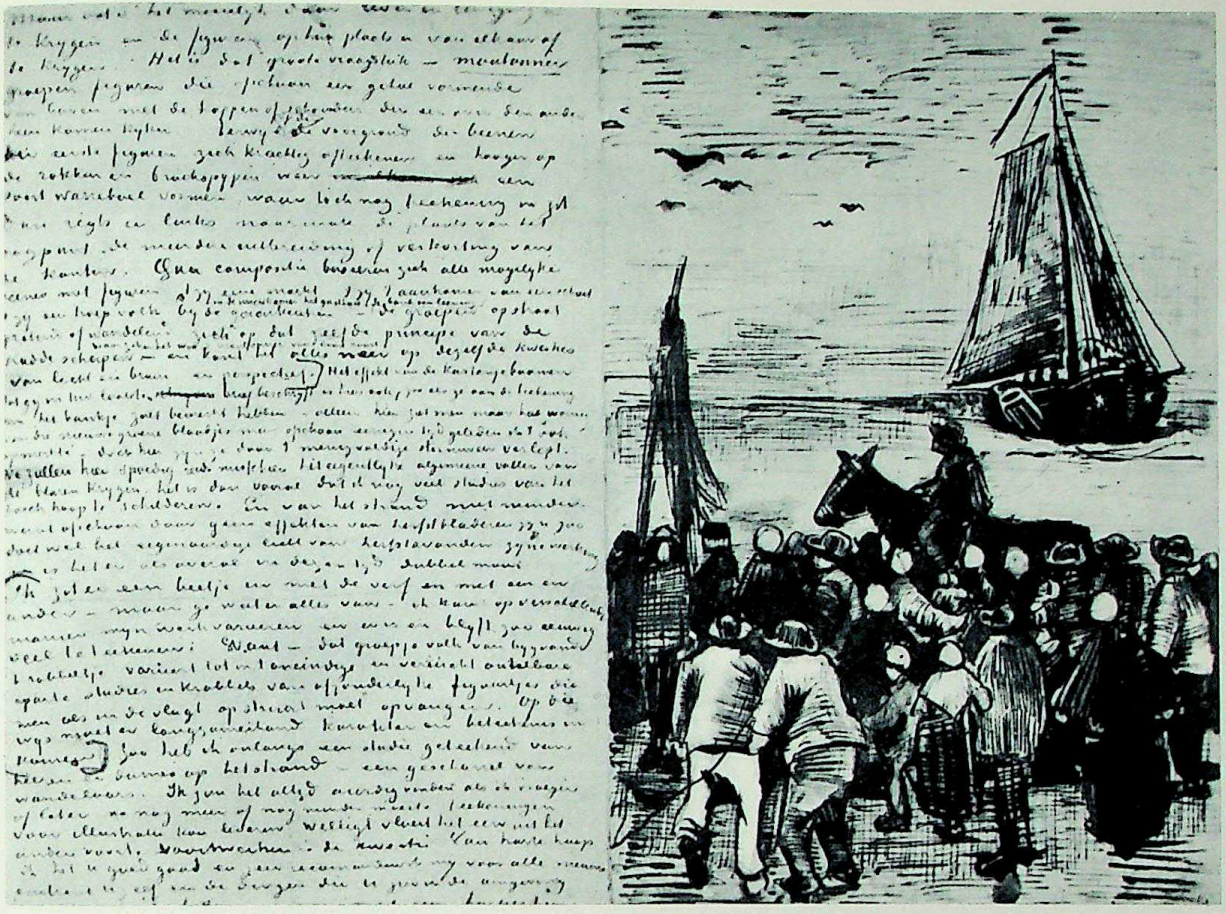
Sien had relapsed. The old life of freedom and irresponsibility attracted her more than being a staid housewife, and she went back to drinking. Vincent's pity was inexhaustible but in September 1883, sore at heart, he broke with her and the children, whom he had come to love very dearly.

He fled from The Hague. For three months he wandered through Drente, one of the northern Dutch counties, living first in Hoogeveen and then New Amsterdam, but in these lonely surroundings (they are still only sparsely inhabited) he felt more than ever solitary and deserted. Only a short while before he had had a family and a home; now he had nothing and nobody.

He was homesick. He hoped to find a kindred spirit in the German painter, Max Liebermann who, he thought, was living somewhere near, perhaps at Zweeloo, but after a series of unlucky mishaps he never found him.

Returns home again

Once again, when in great trouble and at his wits' end, Vincent sought refuge at home, although he had not been there since his angry departure a year and a half before. The Reverend Theodorus van Gogh had been transferred to the parish of Nuenen in August 1882, and it was to Nuenen that Vincent fled, taking refuge 'at home' for the last time. The family was very kind to him, made no allusion to past disagreements and quarrels, but underneath they were



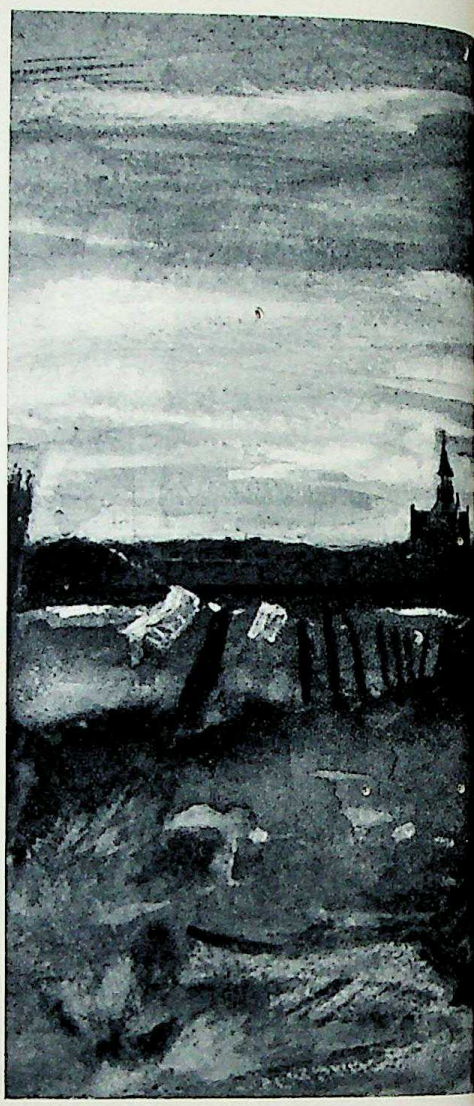
Two pages of a letter written by Vincent from The Hague to his brother Theo (August 1882)

more disturbed than they liked to show by the return of the prodigal in fur cap and blue overalls, the eccentric who clung to his strange ideas with such tenacity.

Vincent had never intended to stay long here in the country, four miles away from Eindhoven, the nearest town. After getting used to it he could no longer do without the society of other artists. He needed the stimulus of other artists' approval or disagreement and in Nuenen this was not to be had, so these few weeks at home were to be only a short interlude.

And yet basically he belonged to North Belgium; to the end of his life he felt a foreigner elsewhere, and when later he lived in the South of France he felt homesick for Nuenen. The Belgian landscape was his 'reality' and the Belgian people were 'his people'.

He was surprised that his parents were so understanding. They even offered,



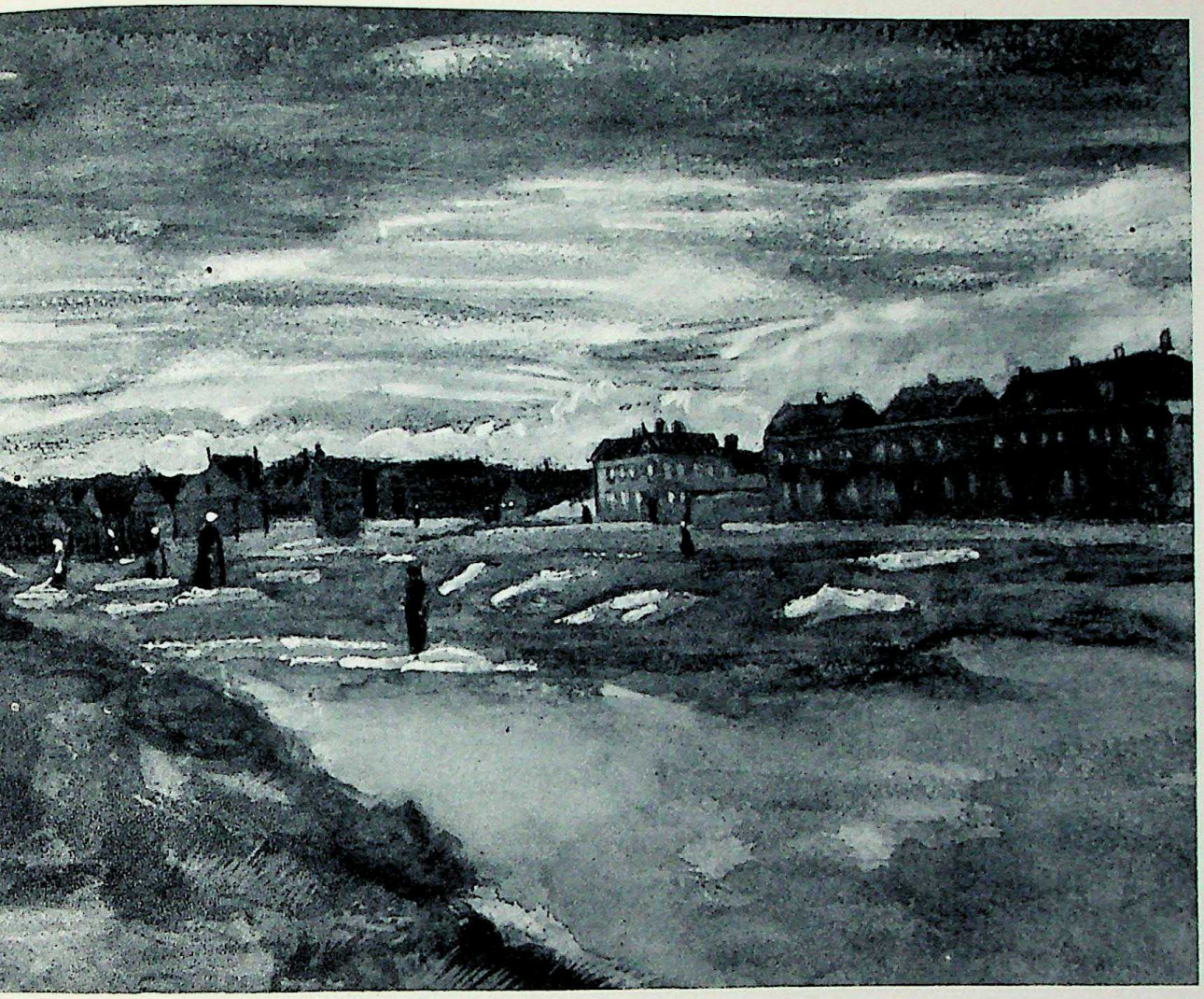
Washing in Scheveningen. Water-colour by Vincent, painted in July 1882

of their own volition, to fit up a little outhouse as a studio and lodging for him. He toyed with the idea of staying longer than he had originally intended.

And then, he had made a new discovery in painting—the range possible in 'local colour'. The three months in Drente had been a revelation to him and he was now trying to put what he had realized there to good purpose in his practical work.

Paints peasants' heads

With his usual energy he set about drawing and painting the local peasants in dark colours, symbolic of the soil with which his models worked and out of which they seemed to have grown.



But it was not long before he noticed that, despite all their good intentions, his parents did not really understand his feelings about art. The relations between them began to suffer. Things got worse and worse until an accident occurred which put the question of Vincent's peculiarities right out of the family's mind.

His mother broke a leg getting out of a train in Helmond and was obliged to keep to her bed for a long time. Here was a real opportunity for Vincent to 'serve' and he won the gratitude and admiration of the whole household by the devotion with which he cared for his mother.

The Presbytery at Nuenen
—photograph

During her convalescence, Mrs van Gogh was regularly visited by a neighbour's daughter, Margo Begeman, who lived in a nearby house called 'Nuneville'.

Margo Begeman

There was something in Margo which found an echo in Vincent's personality. Although she was ten years older than he and not particularly beautiful, she was very intelligent, kindhearted and lively.

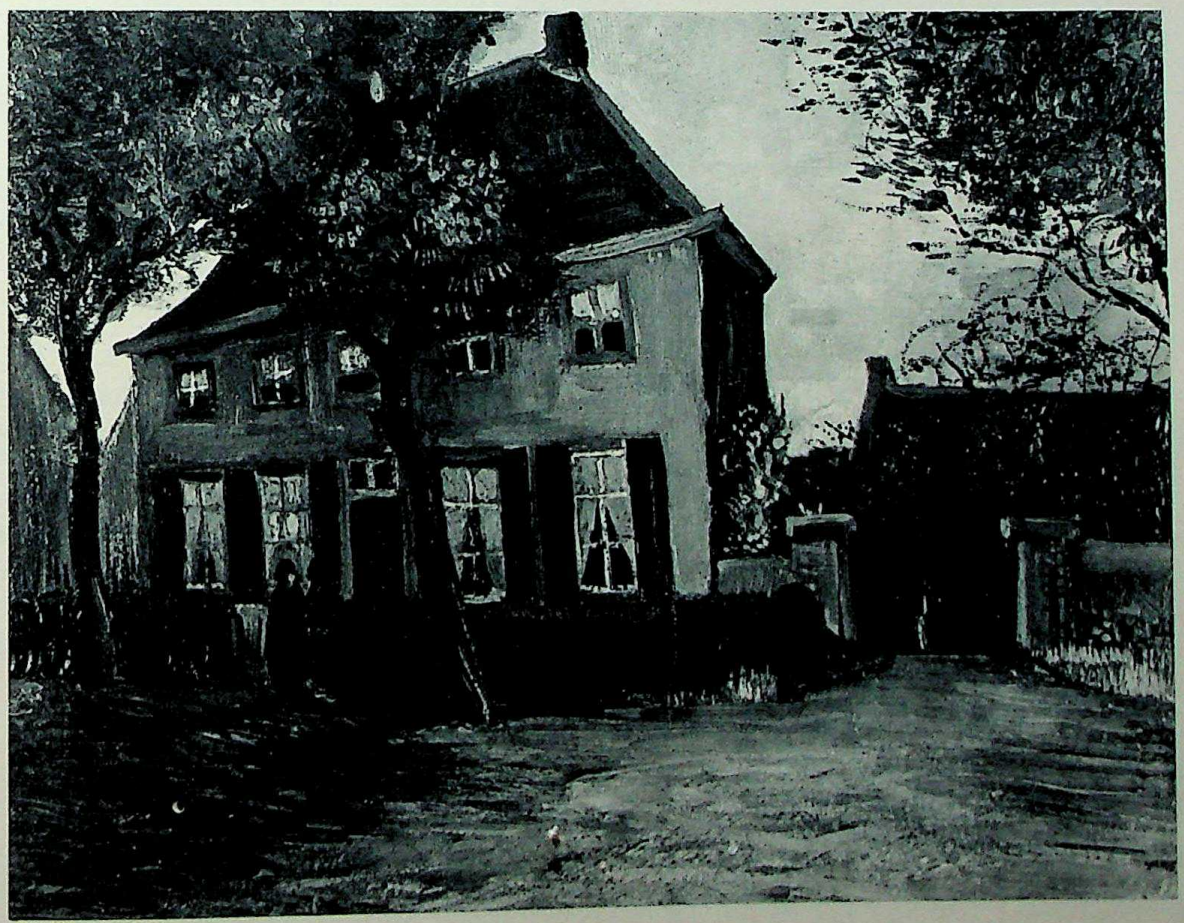
They saw a great deal of each other while both were looking after Vincent's mother and the acquaintance grew into friendship. They went for long walks together and visited the poor of the parish.

Obviously things would not remain at this placid level, but this time they turned out quite differently from Vincent's previous love-affairs. Before it had always been he who loved and the woman who did not. In this case Margo was the one who loved and Vincent was only sincerely fond of her; but even if he did not feel the passion with which he had desired Ursula and Kee, he liked her well enough to want to marry her, and the marriage would, no doubt, have taken place if it had not been for outside circumstances beyond their control.

Margo, quick, intelligent and hard-working, was indispensable to her father's business. Both her father and sisters were, from the start, against any idea of her getting married. Not that they admitted to such selfish reasons for opposing the marriage. They went about it much more cleverly, hinting mistrust

The Presbytery at Nuenen—
Study for the painting . . .

. . . finished in the autumn of 1885



Photograph of
Margo Begeman

'Nuneville', the
Begeman's house

Margo's attempted suicide

of Vincent who was, in any case, considered to be an eccentric ne'er-do-well. In the end they so upset Margo, who was normally a very balanced and decided person, that she had a nervous breakdown and tried to poison herself. Once again, Vincent was involved in a scandal, and this in a tiny village where everybody knew everybody else!

Luckily, Margo's attempt at suicide failed. To restore her health she was sent to Utrecht, returning to Nuenen after six months; Vincent visited her there. Of course, marriage was now out of the question. Margo and Vincent remained good friends. It was the only time a woman really lost her heart to him—and once again it ended in bitter disappointment.

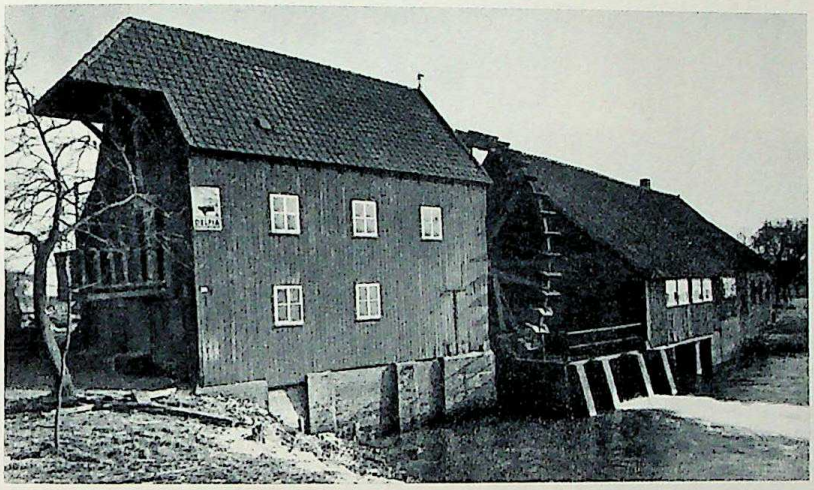
The whole affair had disturbed the peace of Vincent's home so much that there was nothing left for him but to go away again. Ironically, he, the son of a

Protestant parson, found refuge in the home of a Catholic verger called Schafrath. Here later he painted *The Potato-Eaters.*

'The Potato-Eaters'

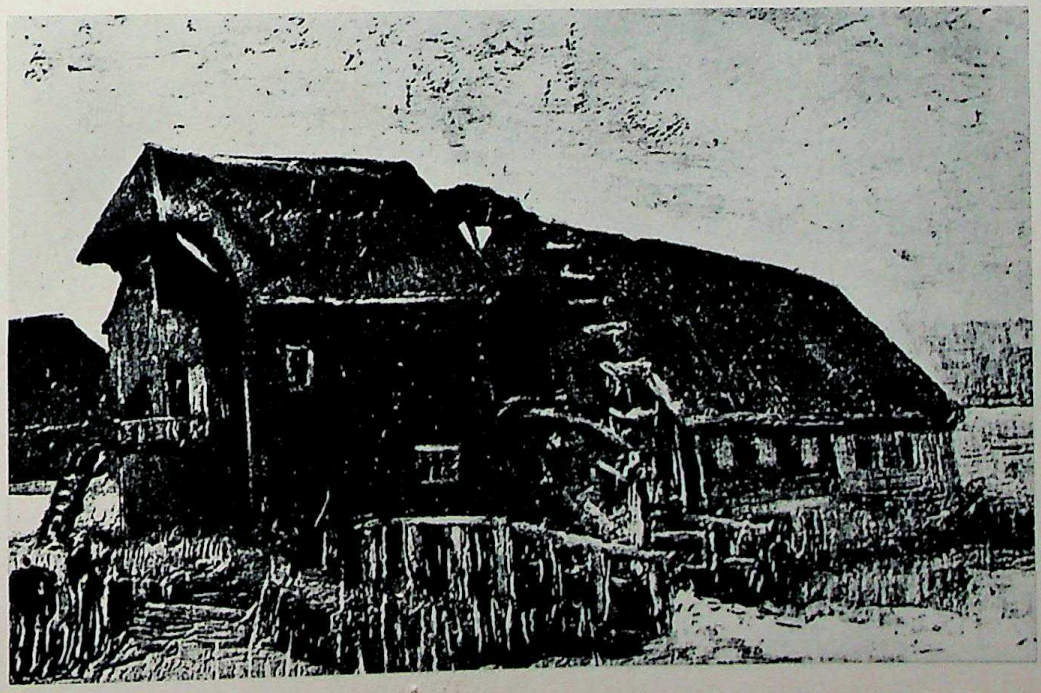
It is moving to think of Vincent in this unhappy situation, painting birds' nests. The symbolic interpretation is only too clear; the pictures portrayed what he lacked in life.

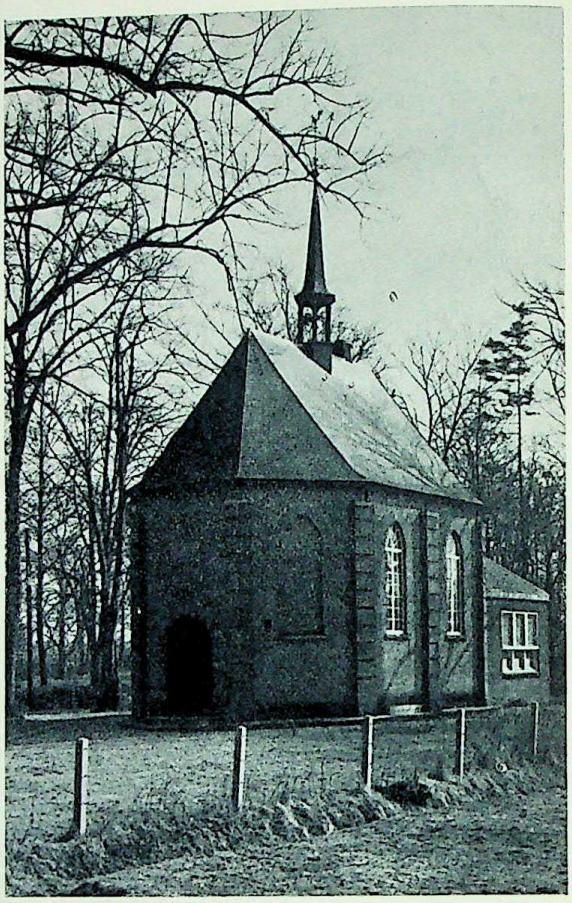
While Vincent was still working on *The Potato-Eaters* and *The Birds' Nests,* yet another catastrophe occurred to involve him in trouble and notoriety. On 26 March 1885, just as he was finishing the fifty peasant portraits which he had set himself as a task for the winter, he learned that his father had had an aortic aneurism after a long walk in the country, and collapsed on his own doorstep.



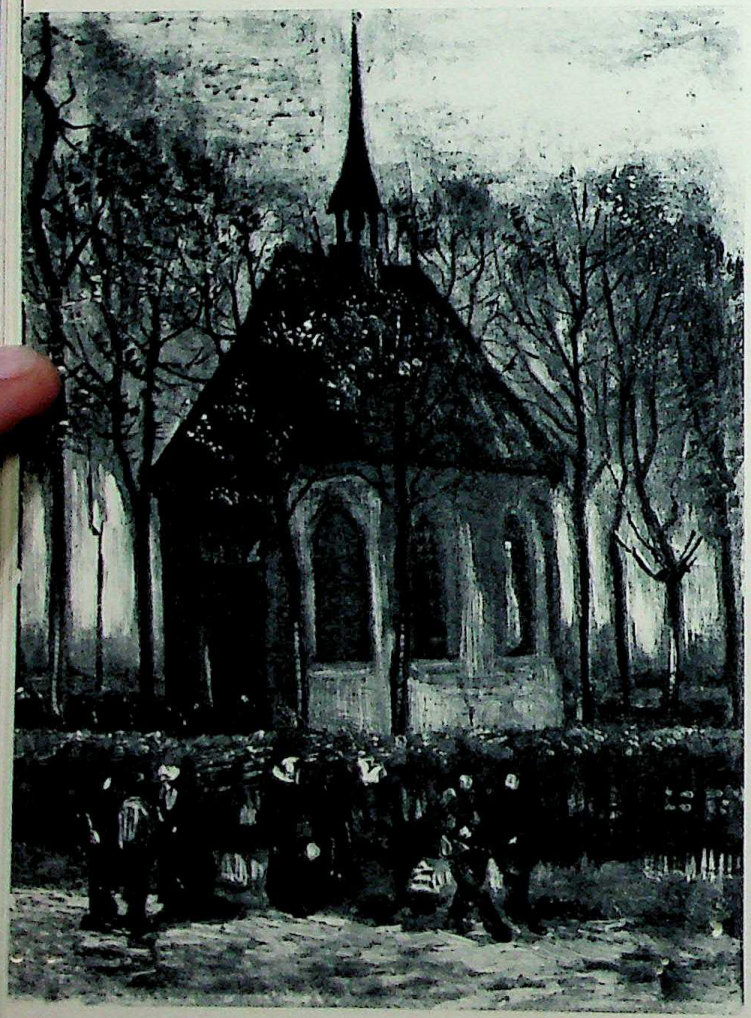
The Watermill near Nuenen —photograph

The same watermill painted by Vincent

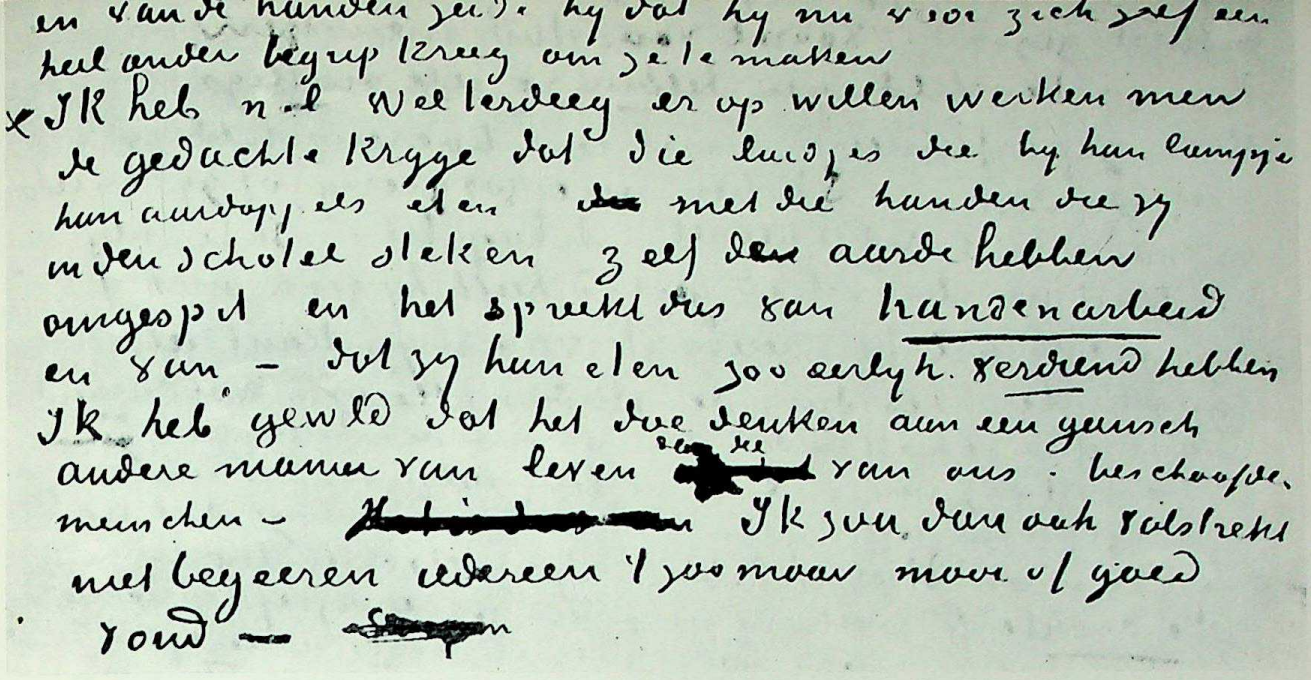




Modern photograph of
the Protestant church in Nuenen



The Protestant Church in Nuenen,
painted by Vincent in January
1884 for his sick mother



Part of Vincent's letter to Theo about *The Potato-Eaters*

Two days before, on the 24th, he had written to Theo about Vincent, saying: 'If only he achieves something, no matter what.'

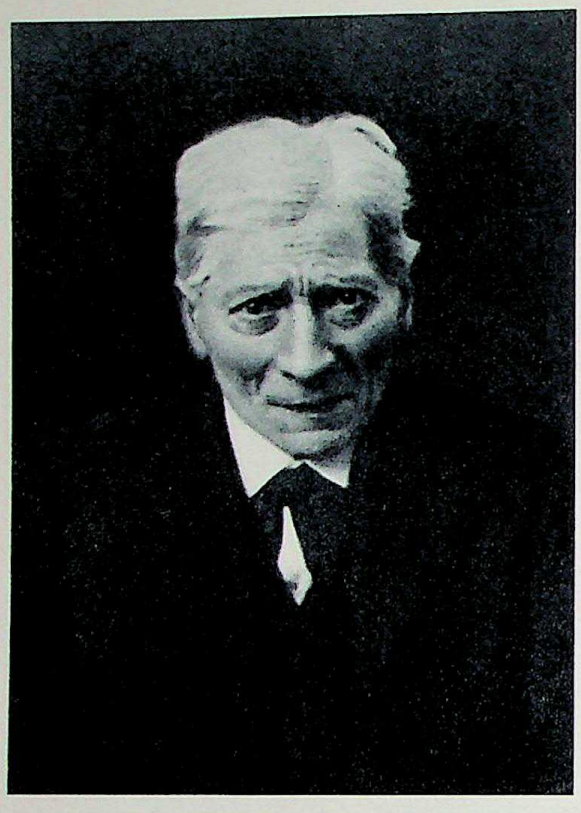
Death of the Reverend van Gogh

There was talk, of course, more than ever before. Vincent, the ne'er-do-well, the 'artistic fellow', was blamed for his father's sudden death.

More than ever he was thrown back on work. He thought that, possibly, if he fully mastered the art of colouring, he might come to rival no less a person than Rembrandt, although he was far too modest ever to say this to anyone. Still, it was his secret aim. He set himself the challenge of painting the innumerable colour-nuances in a dark, oil-lit Belgian interior (the scene, in fact, of *The Potato-Eaters)* with the background and figures all mingling in the general half-light.

On 30 April he wrote to Theo in Paris:

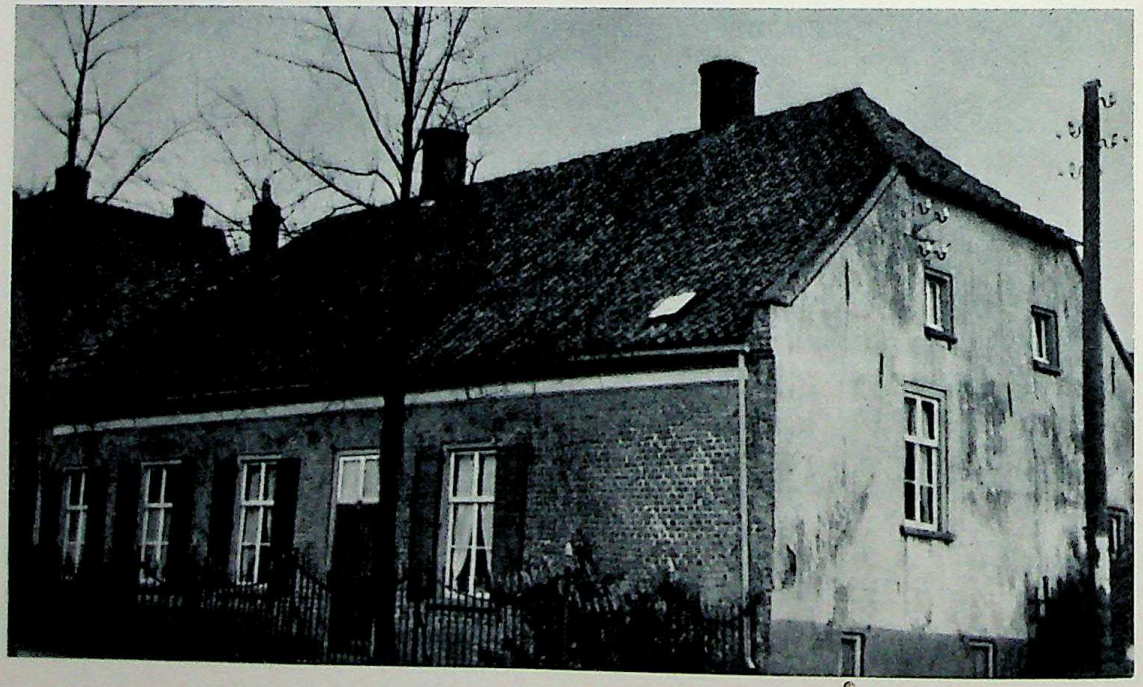
'I have tried hard to paint in such a way that the spectator is immediately struck by the idea that these people, eating potatoes in the lamplight, dug them up with the same hands with which they are now taking them out of the dish; that they are real workers; that they have literally earned their food. I wanted the picture to show a completely different kind of life from the one we educated people live. I was not interested in creating something that somebody might think "good" or "beautiful". All winter long I have had the threads of this tissue in my hands, and have searched for the ultimate pattern and, though it has become a tissue of rough, coarse aspect, nevertheless the threads have been chosen carefully and according to certain rules, and it might prove to be a real *peasant picture.*'



The Potato-Eaters ▶
painted in April 1885

Schafrath, the verger
in whose house Vincent took refuge
after quarrelling with his family

Schafrath's house, where
Vincent painted *The Potato-Eaters*



And in another letter:

'The colour they are painted in now is like the colour of a very dusty potato, unpeeled, of course. While doing this I thought how perfect that saying of Millet's about the peasants is: "*Ses paysans semblent peints avec la terre qu'ils ensemencent.*" '

This picture marked the end of a stage of development. Nothing more was to be achieved in the way of chiaroscuro painting. Six months later he painted *Autumn Landscape with Four Trees,* a view of the scenery behind the vicarage garden, and gave the picture to his pupil, a forty-year-old man from Eindhoven, called Anton Kerssemakers. In it he used a far lighter palette than he had for the past two years; it was the first step in a new direction.

Rupture with Rappard

In the previous autumn, October 1884, van Rappard had visited Vincent at the Nuenen house. His opinion of *The Potato-Eaters* being not exactly flattering, the friendship, which had lasted five years, gradually cooled and after a few months the two men stopped writing to each other.

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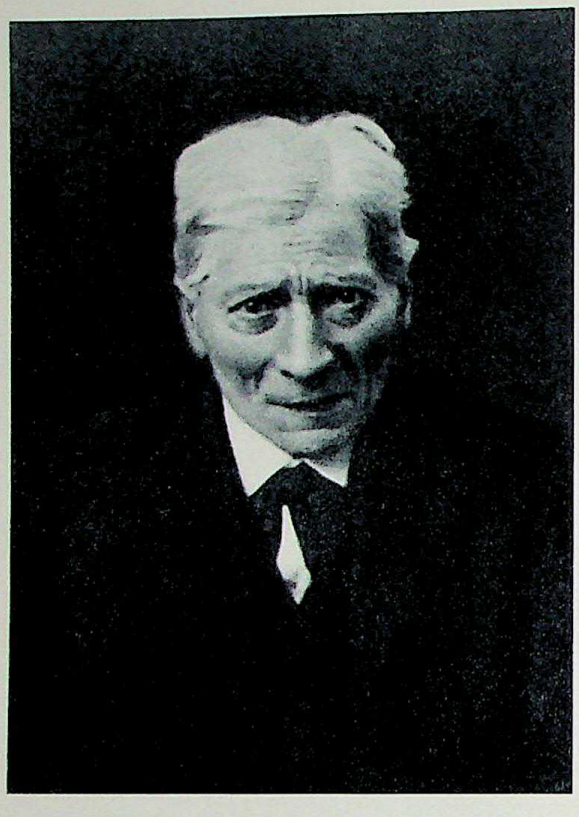
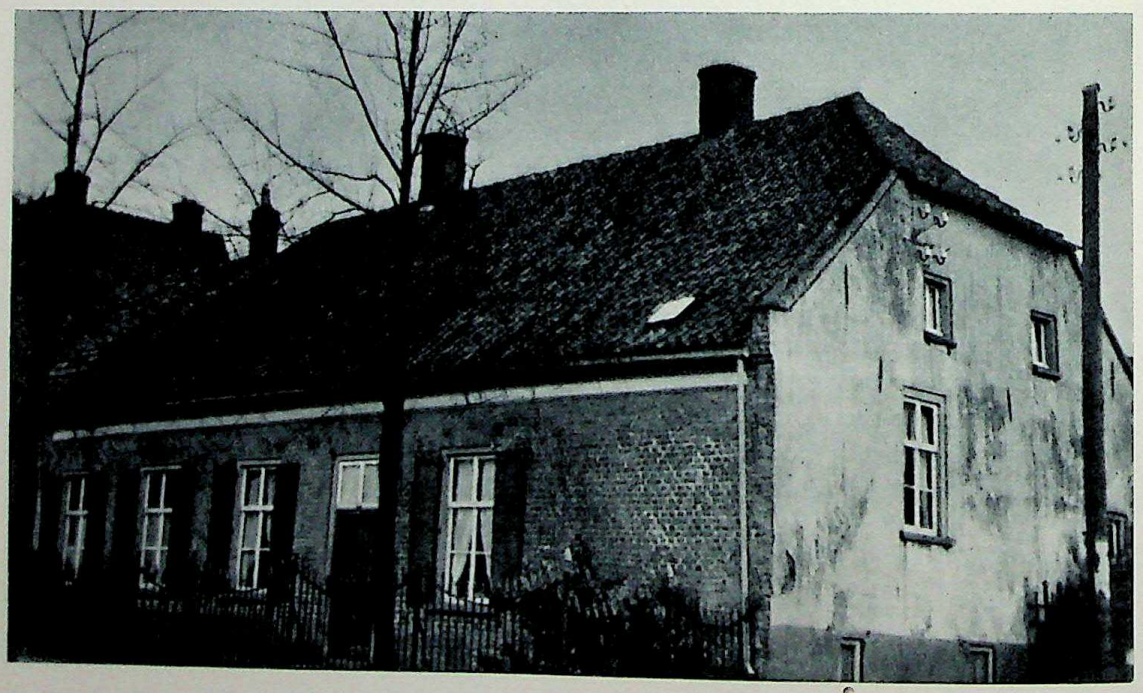


The Potato-Eaters
painted in April 1885

Schafrath, the verger
in whose house Vincent took refuge
after quarrelling with his family

Schafrath's house, where
Vincent painted *The Potato-Eaters*



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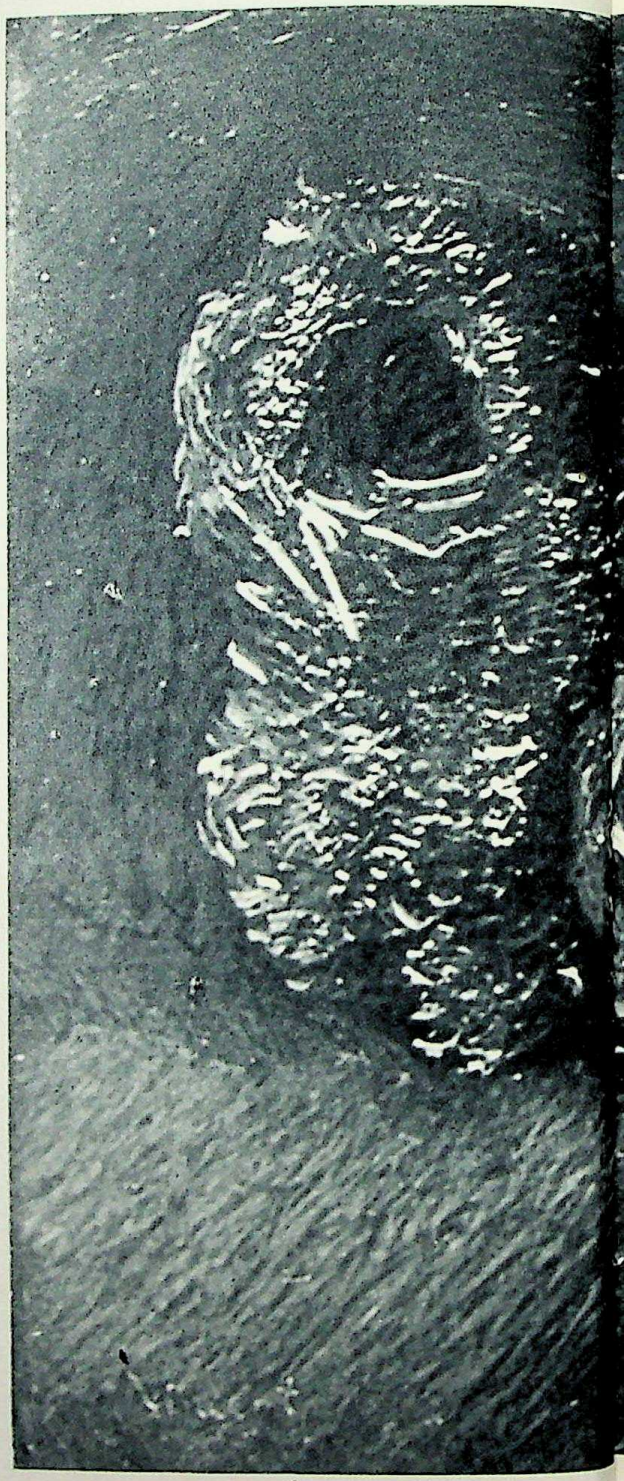
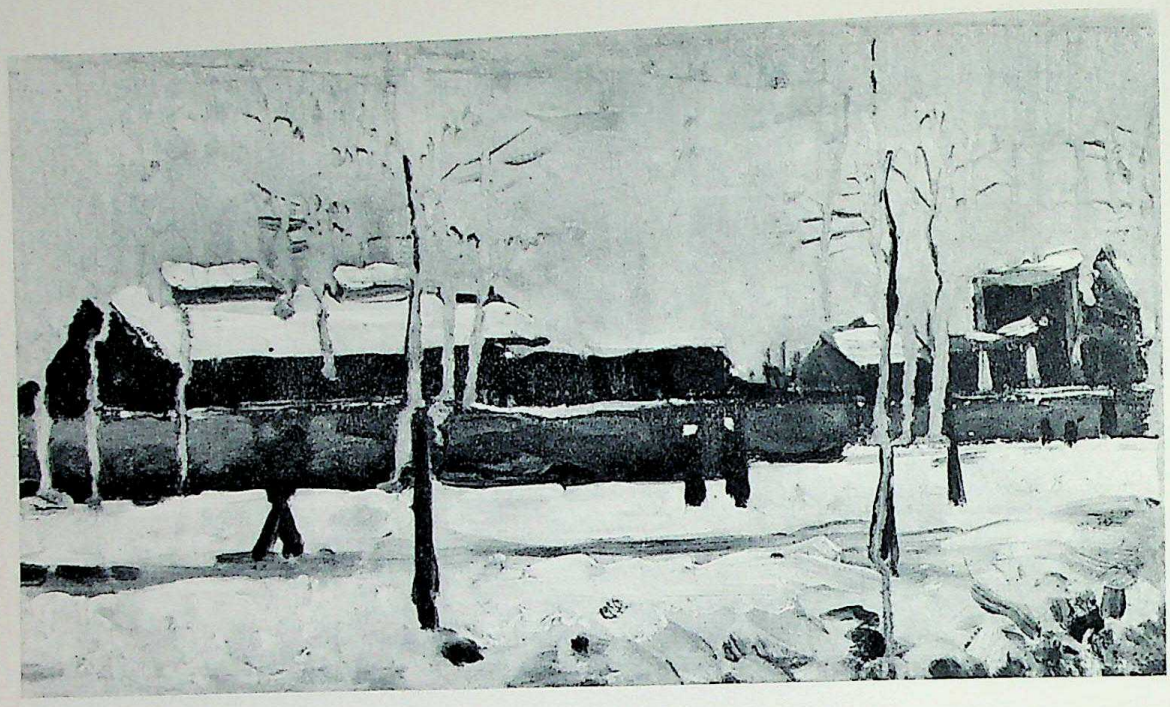


Birds' Nests
Oil-painting by Vincent



The Station in Eindhoven, painted by Vincent from the window of Kerssemakers' studio

As art-teacher in Eindhoven

means who had previously been a goldsmith, van de Wacker, a railway clerk, and Gestel, the son of a cigar-band maker. Vincent gave them all lessons in painting. With Kerssemakers he had four pupils on whom to lavish his desire to serve. He proved an ideal teacher, unselfish and devoted and Kerssemakers at least improved remarkably in a very short time. In the light of Vincent's restless character and future tragic life, it seems amazing to think of him as a teacher, but the fact remains that he was one—and a good one, too.

A few weeks later a new scandal gave the Nuenen village gossips something to talk about. The unmarried daughter of the de Groot family, which had given Vincent the first idea for *The Potato-Eaters,* was pregnant and Vincent, who had spent a good deal of time in the house, was suspected of being the father.

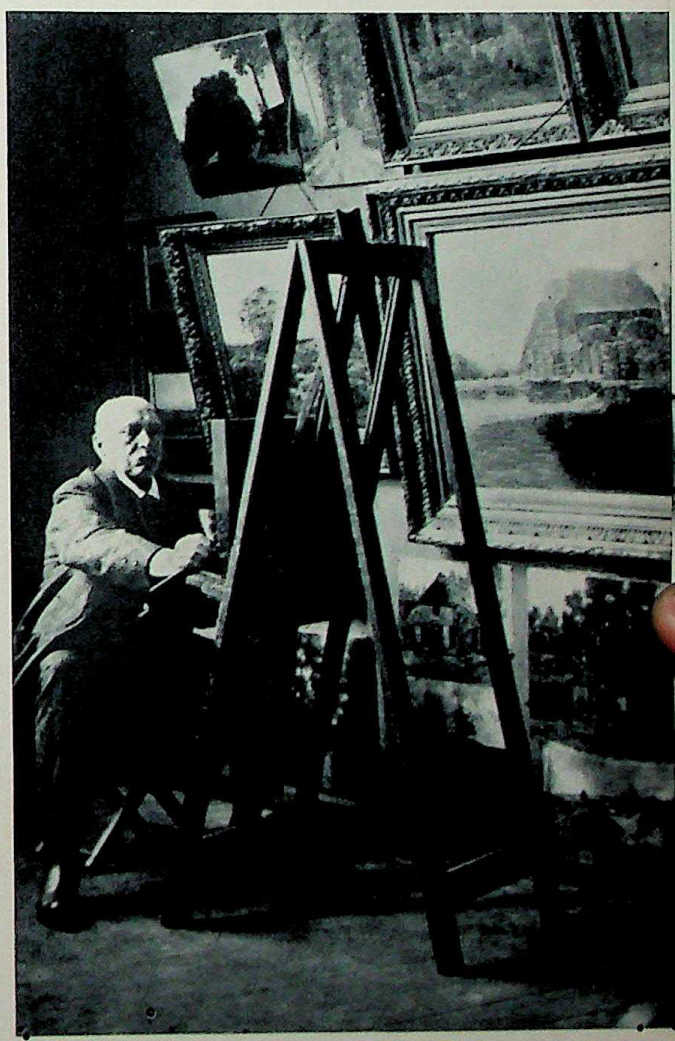
The village priest solemnly warned his parishioners to have nothing to do with van Gogh and, above all, not to act as models for him. Vincent told Theo about it in his letters:

'The last two weeks I have been worried by the Roman Catholic priests who told me ... that I ought not to get too familiar with people below my rank, expressing themselves to *me* in those terms but using quite a different tone toward the people of lower rank, namely, threatening them about having themselves painted.... A girl I had often painted was with child and they suspected

me, although I was innocent, but I had the real state of affairs from the girl herself and, as it was a case in which a member of the priest's congregation at Nuenen had played a very ugly part, they cannot, at least for this once, get at me. But you see that it is not easy to paint or draw people in their own houses and at their work. . . . I again have a few drawings but I could by no means get anybody to pose for me in the fields these days. Happily for me, the priest is getting rather unpopular, but it is nasty business and, if it continued, I should have to move. You will ask, what's the use of making yourself disagreeable? Sometimes it cannot be avoided.'

And, even more agitated:

'I notice that the people hereabouts are still afraid of the priest. . . . If only the business with the priest and the studio would come to an end. . . . The sooner I leave here the better.'



Vincent's pupil, Kerssemakers, in his studio

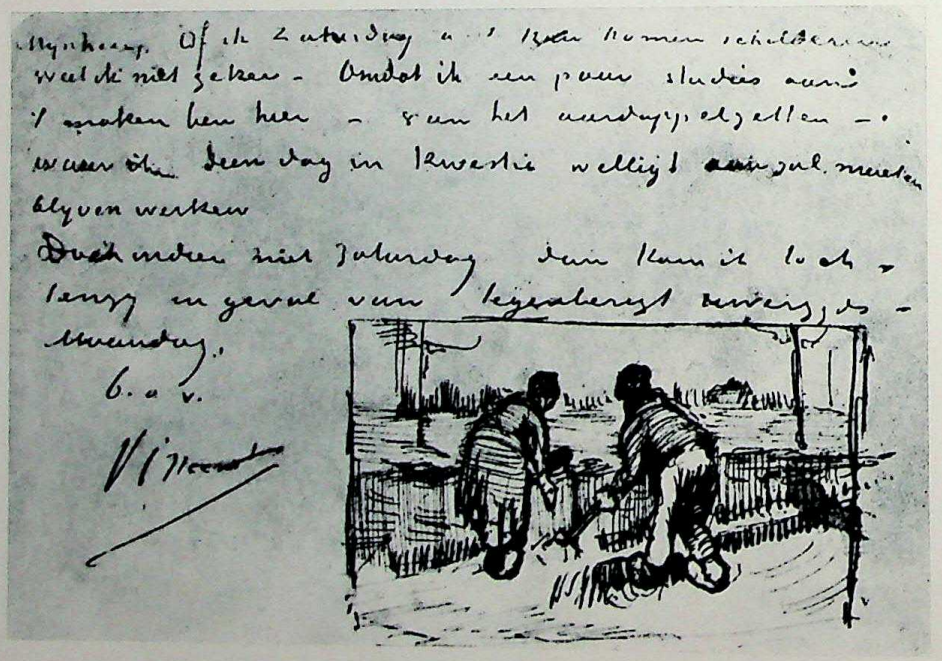
He felt that he had to get back to the world of painting, to the sympathy and understanding of others who were interested in the same things as himself.

'Sometimes it is dreadfully hard to be away from the world of art and artists and to know nothing about what others are doing. For a while back I have had a strong desire to get back among them. When one has been out of everything for a few years, struggling with nature, it is good to go back: it gives one a new ration of courage and health—and you can't have enough of them, for the life of a painter is often hard.'

Antwerp

Even less sensitive characters might have felt, as Vincent did, that he had had enough. He quickly decided to move and seek refuge from gossip and village tittle-tattle in the large port of Antwerp. All his work was left behind, except the paintings and drawings he had already sent to Theo, to show him how hard he was working. His mother, not knowing what to do with it all, packed it up in a box and gave it to a carpenter in Breda for safe-keeping. Far from being safely kept, a large number of canvases and studies ended their life in a paper-mill. Hundreds of drawings and sketches were sold off a barrow for five or ten cents apiece. So ended Vincent's 'Dutch period', as it is now known to art historians.

On 28 November 1885, he arrived in Antwerp. He rented a back room on the second floor of a house belonging to a fellow-townsman who dealt in artists' materials, 194 Beeldekensstraat (now 224). Before long he was wandering



Postcard from Vincent to Kerssemakers, with a pen and ink sketch

The Potato-Eaters, lithography from the painting

The Gestel printing works in Eindhoven where *The Potato-Eaters* was prepared for lithographing

The house in Antwerp where Vincent lived and worked (194 Rue des Images, or in Flemish, Lange Beeldekenstraat)

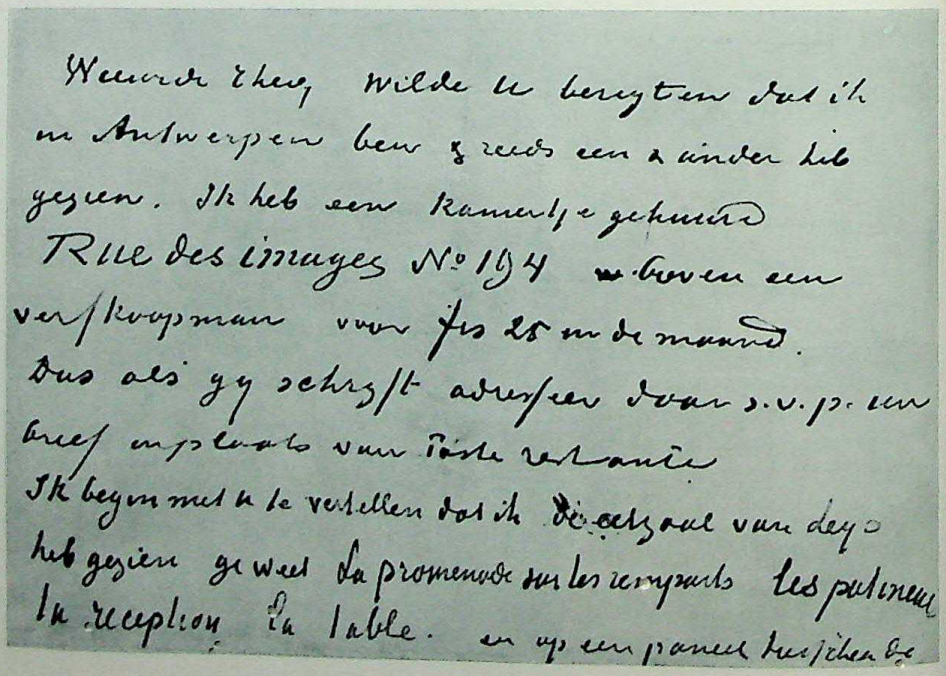
through the busy streets of the town, inwardly noting its peculiar beauty, the medieval castle on the bank of the Schelde, the docks, the big market wall with its Gothic gables and Renaissance façade, the slender spires of the Cathedral. Sooner or later he sketched them all.

But above all, he studied the old masters in the Antwerp Museum. He was also fascinated by an exhibition of contemporary painters, particularly significant for him, the self-taught artist, full of his art, longing to know what others were doing and to make a name for himself.

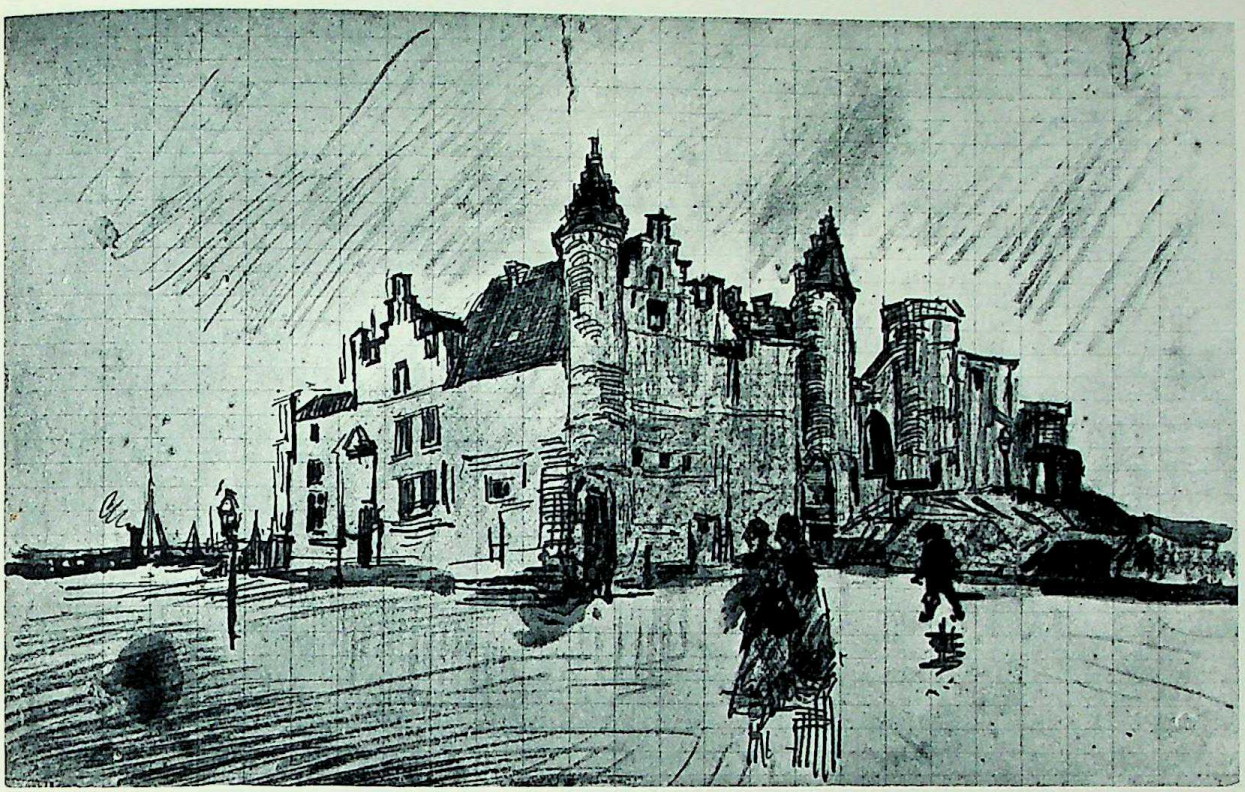
The change of locality from country to town made no difference to his methods of working. He plunged himself into it, just as he had in the isolated Belgian country village. From his window, for instance, he could see the backs of various old houses. His painting of these shows so much freedom in the brushwork and feeling for light colour-values that until a few years ago it was thought to date from his Paris period.

Mixed up with all kinds of curious souvenirs for foreign seamen in a shop in the dock-quarter, he came across some Japanese colour-prints, which fascinated him. They cost only a few cents each so he could afford to buy them and nail them up round the walls of his room.

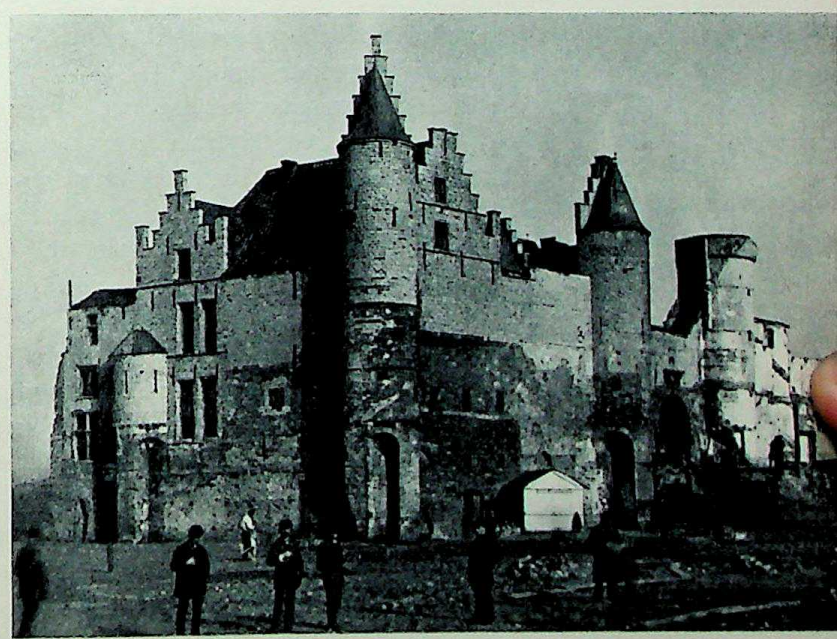
He soon became fully acquainted with every street and corner of the town and began to feel at home in it, jotting down in his sketchbook



Beginning of Vincent's first letter from Antwerp, giving his new address



The Steen in Antwerp,
drawing by Vincent



The Steen in an old photograph

anything that caught his eye—a striking building, a picturesque alleyway. Failing a sketchbook, he used any scrap of paper that happened to come to hand.

With all this, he never forgot why he had come to Amsterdam in the first place. In Nuenen the priest had forbidden the villagers to sit to hims as models and he wanted to paint portraits. The fifty pictures of peasants' heads that he had made as preparations for *The Potato-Eaters* were only a beginning. They had been restricted to a pre-conceived colour plan and copied Millet in trying to link the peasants with the soil. The poverty-stricken atmosphere of the peasants' cottages, which he had recaptured in these pictures, had always provided him with a mass of fruitful ideas, but now he decided to concentrate on portraits almost exclusively. It was not easy, new to Antwerp as he was, to get models, but in the end he came to an agreement with several girls out of brothels in the docks, whereby they sat to him for two or three portraits and received one of them in payment.

Naturally, this barter system did not produce aristocratic lady-sitters or virginal young girls, the more so as Vincent never flattered. On the contrary, he was inclined to paint even more unflatteringly than the reality. As he wrote to Theo: 'I think you are fully aware of the importance of *truth*, so that you will understand me when I say that I want my pictures of peasant-women to be real peasant-women, and my whores to have the true whore look.' Nobody who knows his work can deny that he achieved this aim.

But the choice of models was relatively unimportant. He was trying to do much more in his portraits than merely convey the greater or lesser virtue of this or that female figure.

Rubens

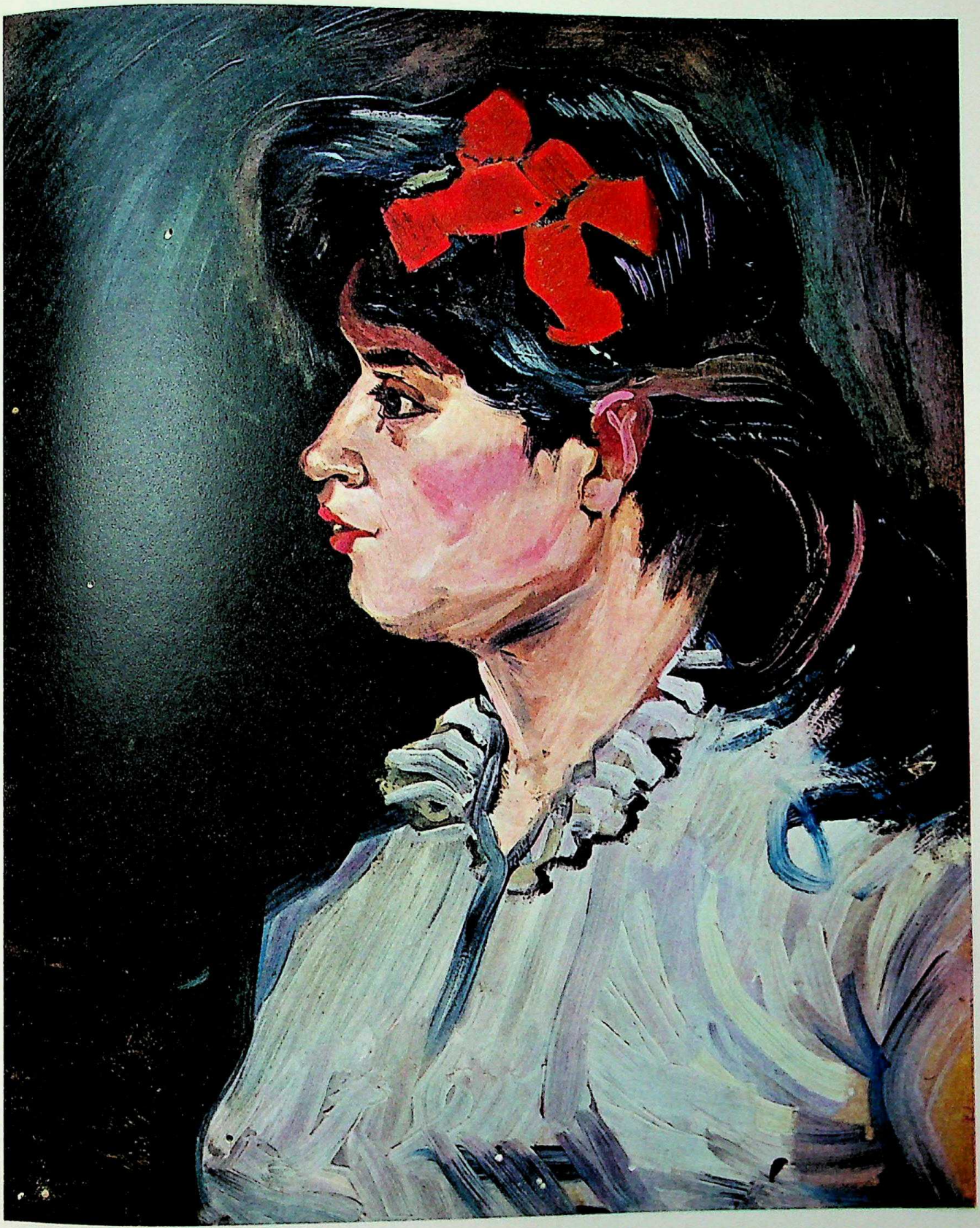
The museum attracted him, not only because of the many artistic treasures he so much admired, but also because, secretly, he longed to follow in Rubens' footsteps. It was Rubens, too, who drew him into many Amsterdam churches which had altarpieces painted by the master.

This was a part of the new phase of Vincent's development. After the dark colouring of *The Potato-Eaters* and his peasant paintings, he felt a need to enlarge his nine-colour palette and take in lighter colours.

In October 1885 he had spent three days in the Amsterdam Museum with Kerssemakers. It was only to be expected that he should be drawn to Rembrandt and Frans Hals, but that Rubens should attract him was surprising, particularly as the only example of Rubens' work was a rather inferior female head.

In his letters to Theo, Vincent enthused about his new discovery. He felt that the Flemish artist had something which the Dutch painters lacked—something in his way of painting female flesh. He wanted to

Girl from a Café-Chantant. Oil-painting by Vincent, 1885



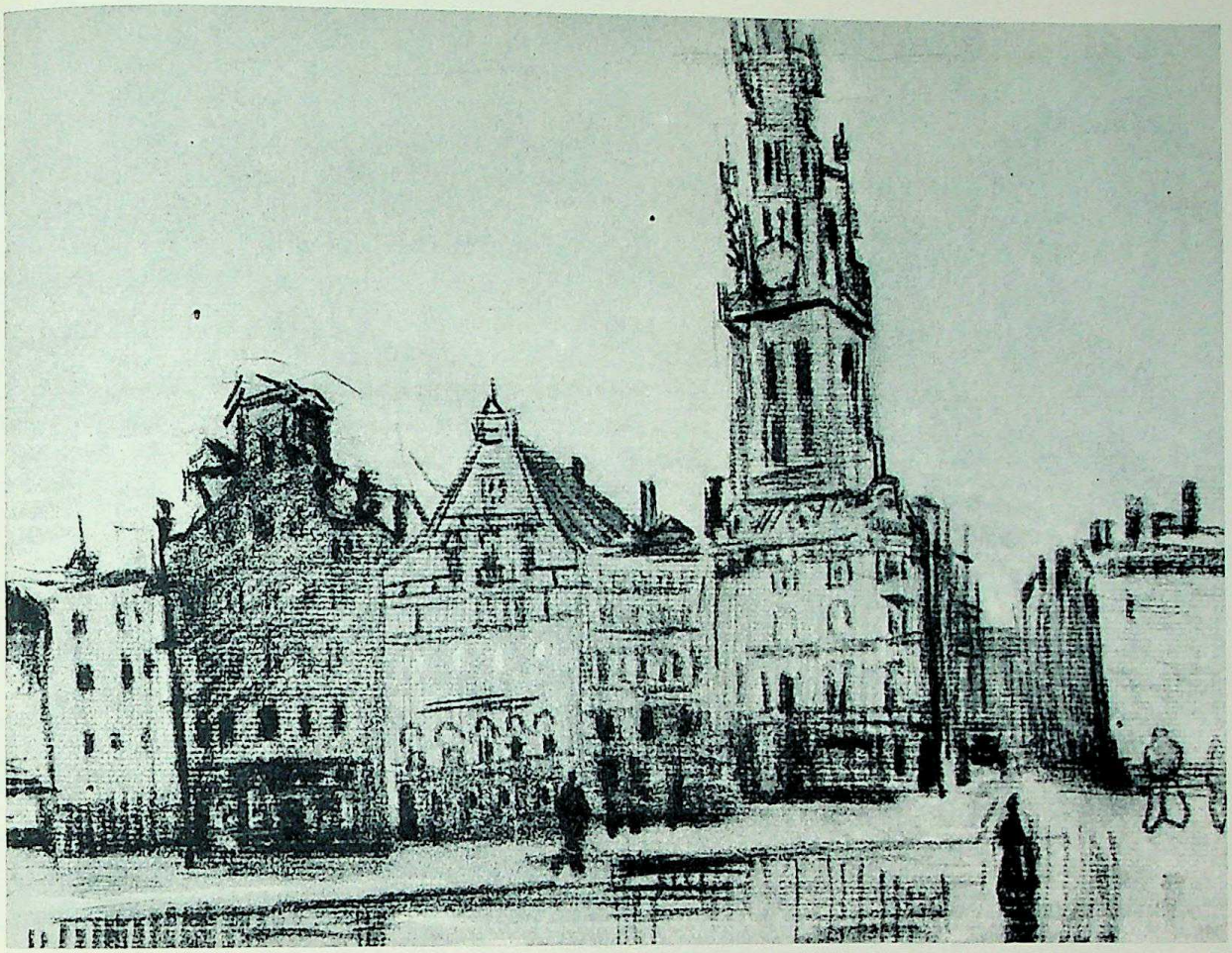
penetrate this secret, to see more of Rubens than Amsterdam offered him.

For this, Antwerp, the town where Rubens had passed a good deal of his life, was ideal. Once there, he immediately realized what the secret was, that Rubens had mixed white with carmine—a colour Vincent had never risked until then.

He was so pleased with the discovery that he decided to try it out in his own portraits, of men as well as of women, and the result can be seen in the series of portraits dating from his stay in Antwerp. Two of them, both prostitutes, are particularly successful. At this time, he wrote that *l'art pour l'art*, a concept he had previously always refused, 'is, after all, right for all the good people'.

Stimulated by these successes he worked like one possessed. He ran through huge quantities of canvas, paint and brushes in a very short time and reduced the money he allowed himself for living to the absolute minimum. This money

Market-place, Antwerp, photographed in 1955



Market-Place, Antwerp, one of the first drawings Vincent made after his arrival

was, in any case, provided by Theo, who sent contributions as often as he could.

But money or no money, he could not give up or cut down his work just now when it was going so well. Instead, he decided either to fast for a few days or manage with only a slice of bread or a glass of milk. How long he could keep up such a diet he did not bother to ask. The only thing that mattered was to become a fully skilled painter and draughtsman in the shortest possible time.

He had to do two mutually incompatible things—reduce his costs to a minimum and deal fairly with the people who sat to him as models, which cost money. From the fact that he was always engaging new models one may deduce that he did not succeed in doing this. The lack of models cost him almost more worry than the lack of drawing materials.

But he could not give up his aim when on the verge, as he felt, of success, so he made a virtue of necessity and joined the Antwerp Academy, where models were provided.

Accepted by the Academy

The professors at the Academy found that their new thirty-two-year-old red-headed and untidy pupil was 'not without talent' and magnanimously granted him admission on 18 January 1886.

But after a few days, it was the old story again. The same disagreements Vincent had had with Mauve in The Hague arose again with Siberdt in Antwerp. Once again, Vincent was set to draw plaster models, heads, trunks, limbs and so on, but this would not have been so bad if his teacher, Siberdt, a very mediocre artist himself, had not been both reactionary and spiteful in his criticisms, while Vincent was forward-looking and, if anything, over-sensitive.

If Vincent ventured to protest against the old-fashioned contour-drawing taught, or spoke of the need to visualize things from the inside, Siberdt looked at him as though he had said something monstrous.

Basically modest, Vincent sometimes had a conviction in himself which could be disconcerting. Three months earlier, for instance, he had given Kerssemakers a picture, the *Autumn Landscape with Four Trees*, and Kerssemakers had asked him to sign it. His answer might have seemed conceited: 'That won't be necessary: they will be able recognize my work.'

N° 61

Koninklijke Academie van Beeldende Kunsten

TE ANTWERPEN.

WINTERKOERS 1885-1886.

BEWIJS VAN TOEGANG.

M Van Gogh Vincent

is ingeschreven als leerling der Academie en is aangenomen in de klas van Antwerpen, den 18 Januari 1886

DE ADMINISTREERDER,

The certificate of admission issued by the Antwerp Academy

Main entrance of the Antwerp Academy

Side entrance of the Academy leading to the beginners' classes

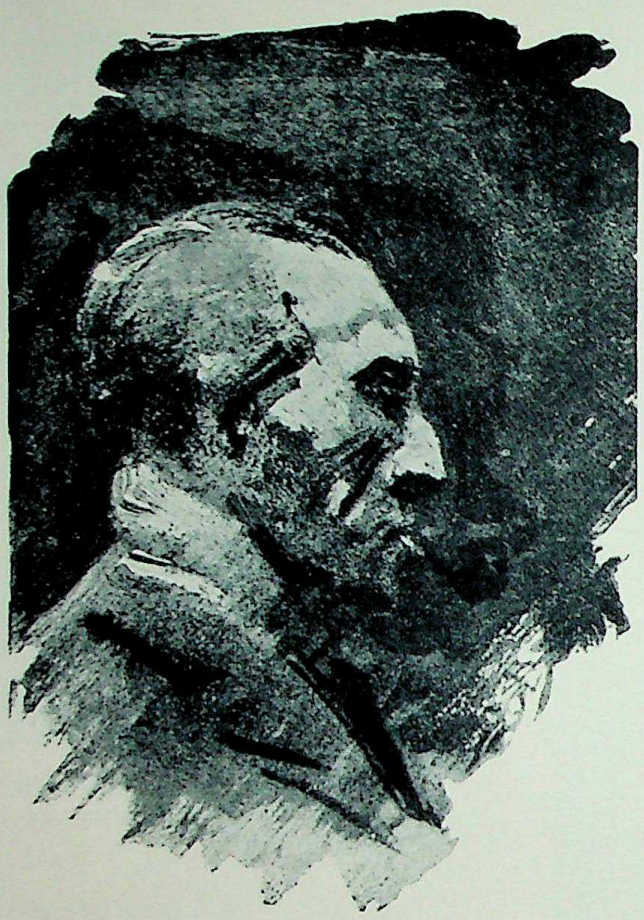
The artist's self-confidence

He could afford to pity Siberdt for his ideas about art, ideas which were already old-fashioned, which had gone out a quarter of a century ago. It was the old conflict between academic narrow-mindedness and the artistic intuition of the true poineer.

But Vincent's short stay in the Antwerp Academy added something to his life if not to his knowledge of art. It seemed to be inevitable that wherever he went he caused a scandal but at the same time gained a kindred spirit with whom he could converse on equal terms.

Vincent's portrait is painted

At the Academy he met the English painter, Levens. Their strong friendship lives on in a water-colour portrait of him by Levens—the only portrait of his which has ever become well known. It was the first time that Vincent's portrait had been painted by another artist.



Portrait of van Gogh
painted by Levens, an English artist

At the Academy Vincent learned that there were two sketching clubs in Antwerp—the one functioning from eight till ten p.m., the other from ten till midnight. In protest against the puritanism of the Academy, which did not allow figure-drawing, the sketching clubs used female models. One of these clubs met in an old house near the market-place, which Vincent had drawn soon after his arrival in Antwerp.

Eager to grasp at any opportunitiy to improve his work, Vincent became a member of both clubs, working solidly from eight till twelve p.m., after having previously spent his whole day at the easel. But the tautest string has its breaking-point. In February he collapsed from physical exhaustion and mental over-strain. Within a short period he lost ten teeth, contracted a gastric disease and became feverish.

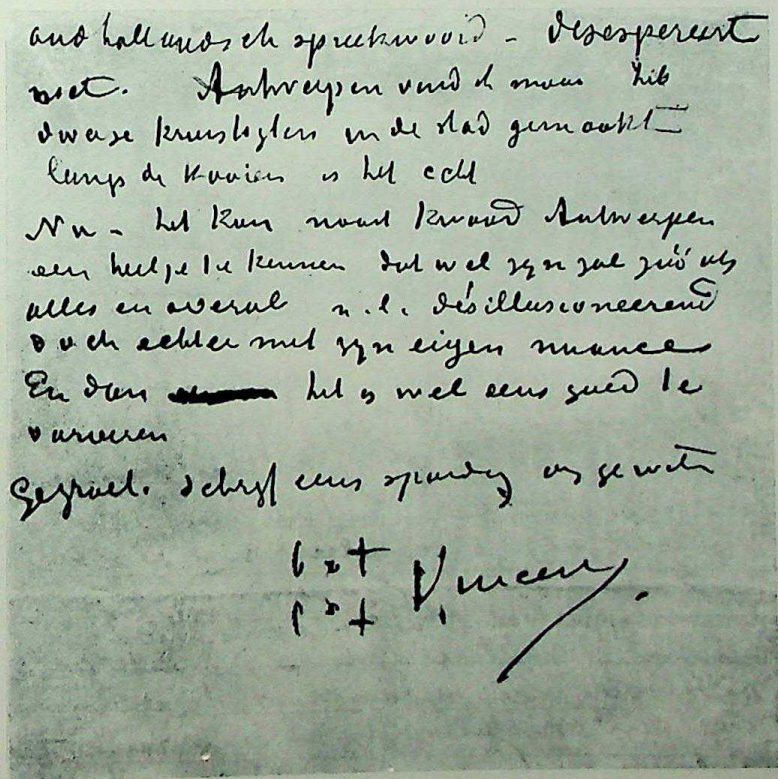
His appeal to Theo, begging to be allowed to come to Paris, was not answered. At last, at the end of the month, without waiting any longer, he set

off by train for the French capital taking all his possessions, such as they were, with him. *Paris*

The next day when Theo was at work in the shop of Boussod, Valadon & Co. in the Boulevard Montmartre, a note was brought to him. Written in black chalk it said briefly that Vincent had arrived and was waiting for him in the Salon Carré in the Louvre. Theo was probably less surprised than another man would have been. From long experience he knew that when Vincent had taken an idea into his head he could not rest until he had carried it out.

Unselfish as ever, Theo reflected that living with Vincent could have its advantages. For one thing, he would not need to pay two people's rents, and the food for two would come cheaper than if they were catering for themselves separately. And then they would both have a companion—Vincent especially would not feel lonely.

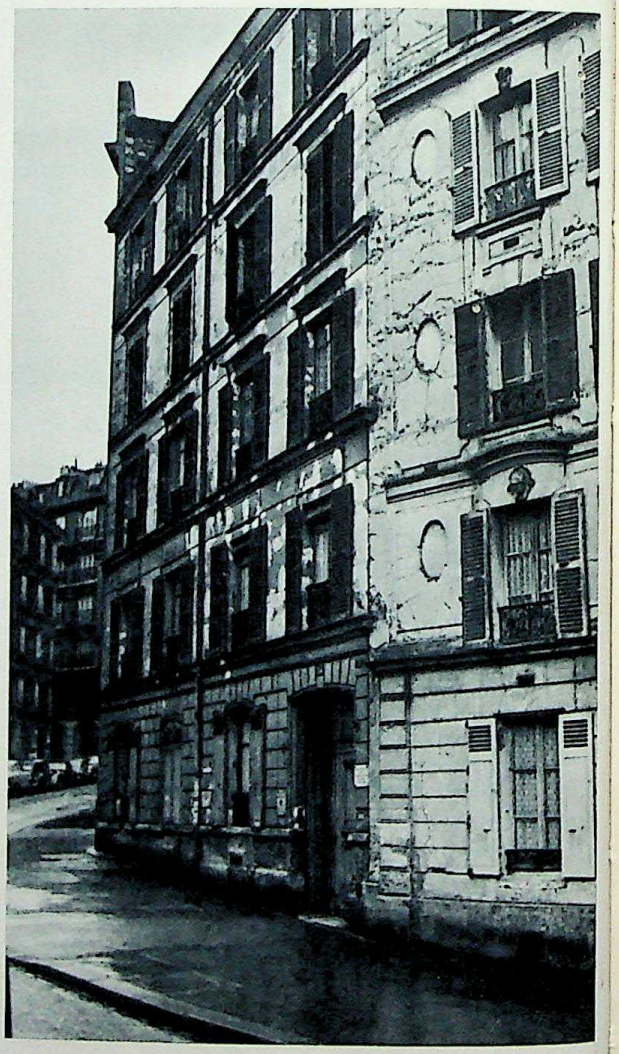
But first he would have to see about getting other lodgings. His present place in the rue Laval (now rue Jean Macé) was only just big enough for one and would never do for two, particularly when one of them needed room to paint. Besides, if he got a larger place, Wilhelmien, the youngest von Gogh daughter, could live there too.



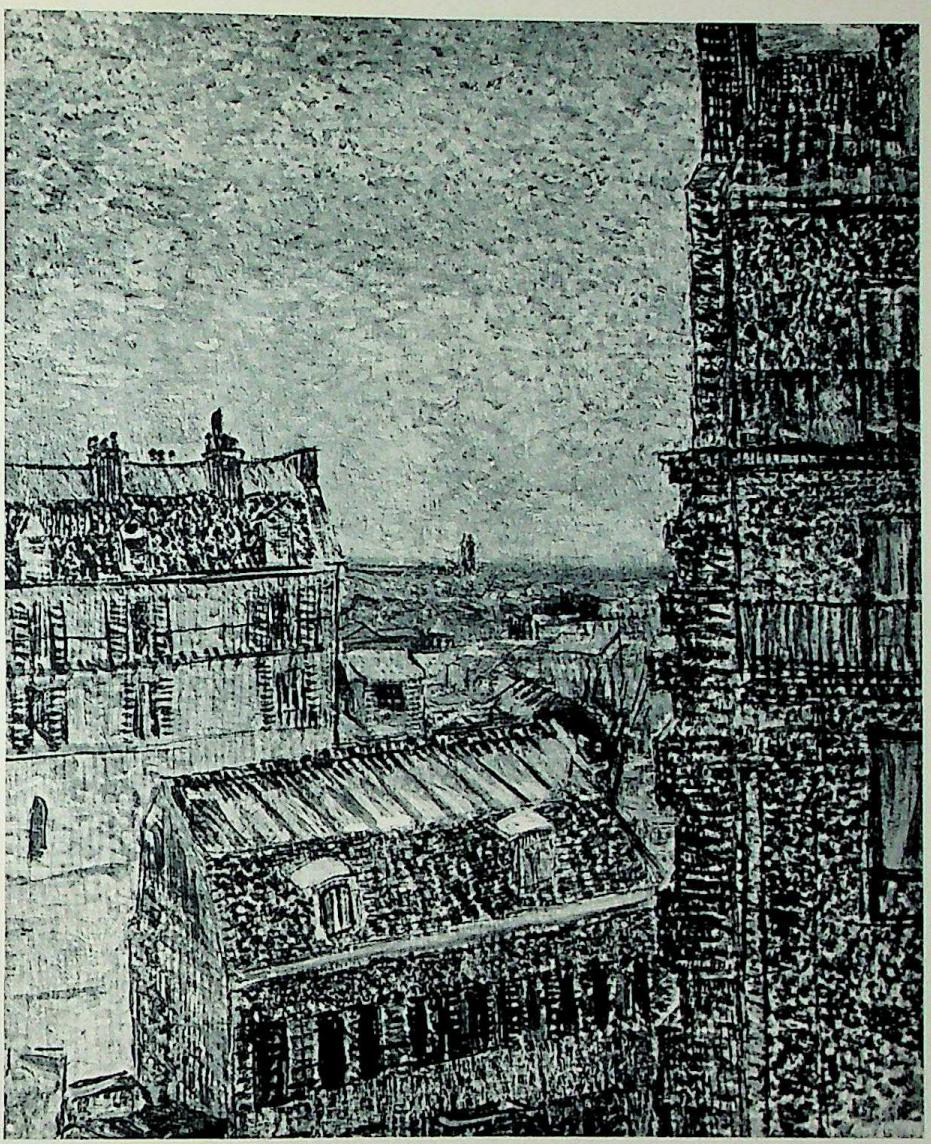
End of the first letter written from Antwerp

In the Cormon Studio

Without waiting for these domestic details to be settled, Vincent straightaway signed on at the Cormon Studio, which he had repeatedly mentioned in his letters from Antwerp. In fact, it had had a good deal to do with his sudden descent on Paris. At the Antwerp Academy, despite all the upsets, he had come to appreciate 'the all-powerful knowledge and accuracy of feeling of the ancients', as he drew from copies of their works. When the course ended in February he considered it necessary to pursue this line of development in drawing—but preferably under someone less dogmatic than Siberdt and his colleagues. Once in Paris, he dashed off to the Cormon Studio almost before he had had time to put his belongings in Theo's lodgings.



54 rue Lepic, where Vincent lived with his brother in Paris



View from van Gogh's Room, rue Lepic, where Vincent lived in Paris
Oil-painting by Vincent

While he was plunging into work with renewed ardour in Paris, an ironic little epilogue was being added to the Antwerp episode. The Professors of the Academy, whose paintings, complete with frames, would sell for a few shillings nowadays, unanimously decided to relegate Vincent to the bottom class, among the thirteen to fifteen-year olds. Vincent, who had already painted *The Potato-Eaters,* amongst other important work! He never got to know about this decision; it remains one of the curious twists of art history.

Theo's new lodgings

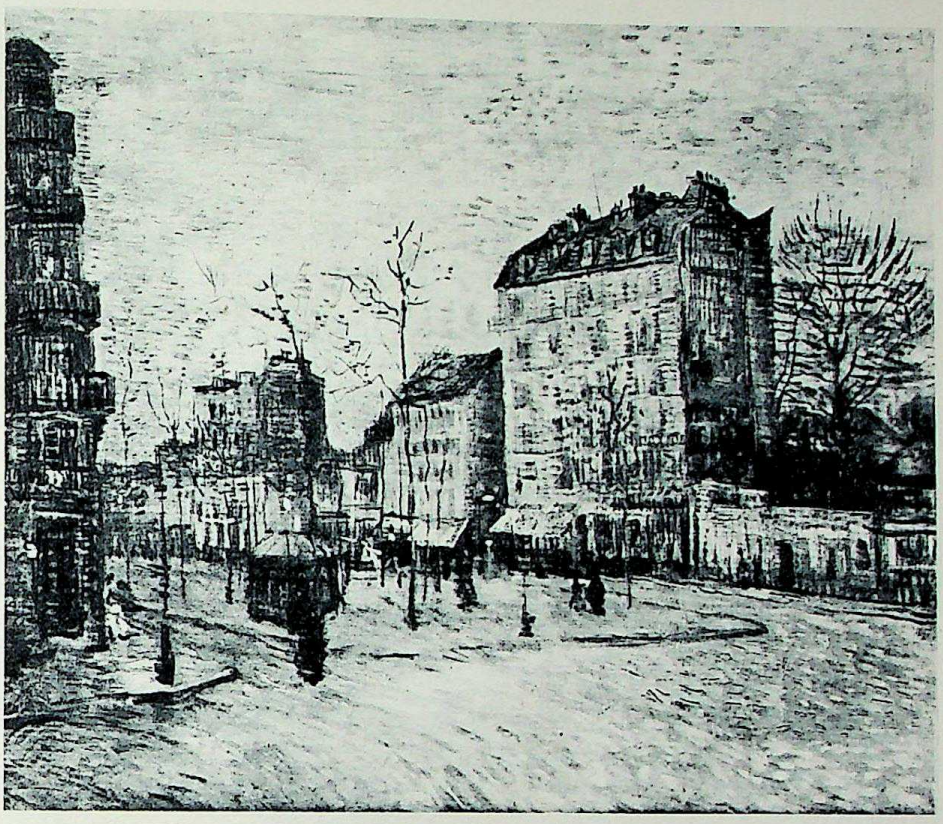
In June, three months after Vincent's arrival in Paris, the two brothers moved to new rooms at 54 rue Lepic, in Montmartre, not far from the Boulevard de

Photograph of Theo
taken while Vincent was in Paris

Wilhelmien van Gogh,
Vincent's youngest sister

Clichy. They had three large rooms, one of which Vincent used as a studio, besides a small kitchen and bathroom; later Vincent painted these rooms several times. He also frequently painted the view over Montmartre from the windows and looked forward to making excursions into the Paris countryside, to the Bois de Boulogne, Asnières, Joinville, Suresnes and Chatou.

From the biographer's point of view, this Paris period is a difficult one. Since Vincent and Theo were living together there was no need for them to write to each other about what they were doing and thinking; the correspondence was only resumed when they separated again. Consequently, we know less about the two years in Paris—a turning-point in Vincent's work when he switched from the early chiaroscuro to painting in light tones—than about any other period in his life.



Boulevard de Clichy,
Paris,
painted by Vincent

Photograph of the
Boulevard de Clichy.
Extremeright, the 'Moulin Rouge'.

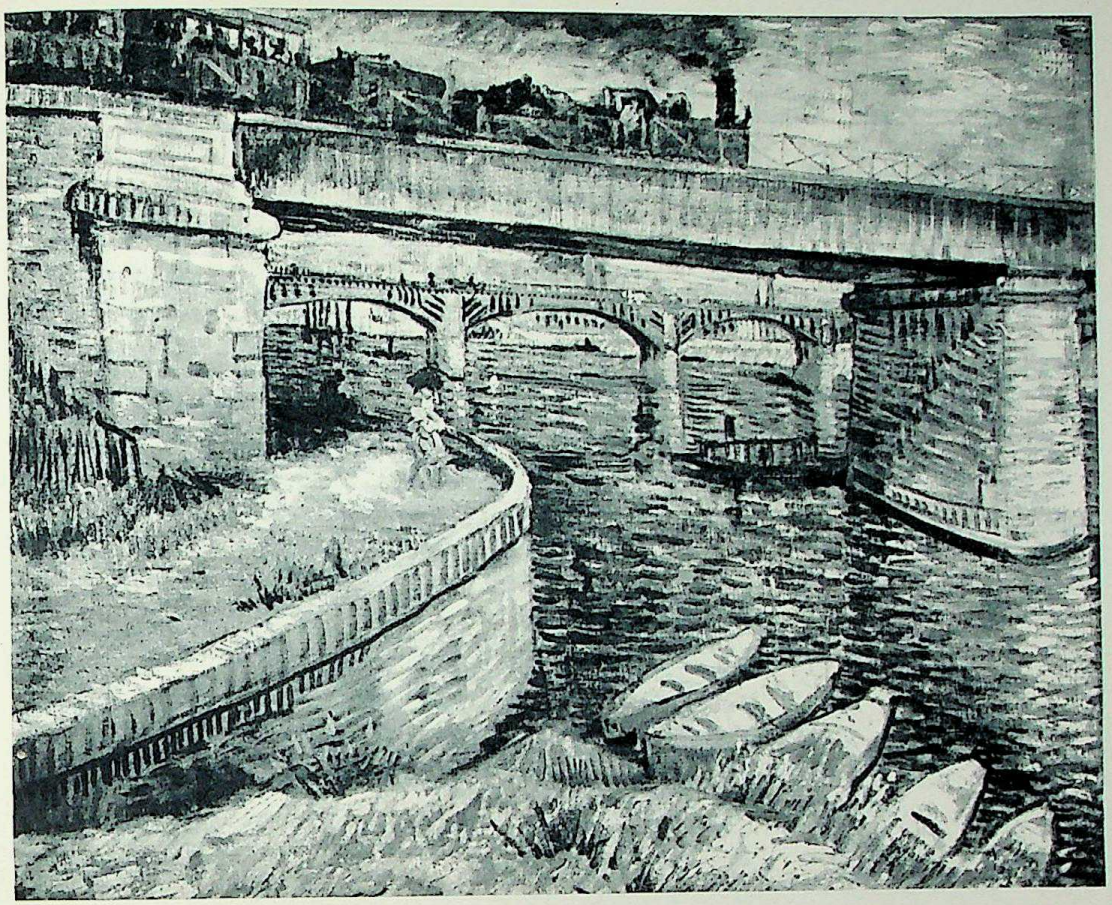
In the same way, little is known of his studies at Cormon's except that they did not last long. A few surviving drawings, a seated nude, for instance, show an almost academic virtuosity, as though Vincent had at last found what he had been looking for—the Classical spirit. But this was not the only thing Cormon's gave him. He also made two new friends there with whom he could talk and discuss on equal terms. And even when he left the studio, the friendship continued until his death.

Emile Bernard and Toulouse-Lautrec

The two men were Emile Bernard and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. The latter needs no further description. His story and work are already well known all over the world. The other, Bernard, did not fulfil the promise that he showed in youth, but both filled a gap in Vincent's affections, shared in his moments of satisfaction and despair. He gave Toulouse-Lautrec his Pointillistic study of Paris, painted from his window.

Theo had met a young Dutchman, who was not a creative artist but who had cultivated his tastes and had an eye for good painting. He introduced Theo to Odilon Redon, who in his turn introduced him to a man who was to become

Photograph of the Bridge of Chatou. The bridge has been altered several tim



Le Pont de Chatou. The same bridge in a painting by Vincent

André Bonger

his life-long friend and make a third in the van Gogh circle, André Bonger. Three years later, Theo married his sister, Johanna. The three friends, Theo, Vincent and Dries, as they nicknamed Bonger, generally ate together in Madame Bataille's restaurant, near the van Goghs' lodgings.

Vincent was charmed with Montmartre, which at this time was still fairly rural and, above all, still had its windmills, reminiscent of his native countryside. He painted innumerable variations on this theme—the windmills in their characteristic setting. The Moulin de la Galette was his particular favourite: it was only round the corner from their lodgings and reappears in several pictures.

Looked at chronologically, the pictures show just how far Vincent had left his old style behind him. In his letters from Drente he had discussed again and again the question of matching figures to their background environment, but

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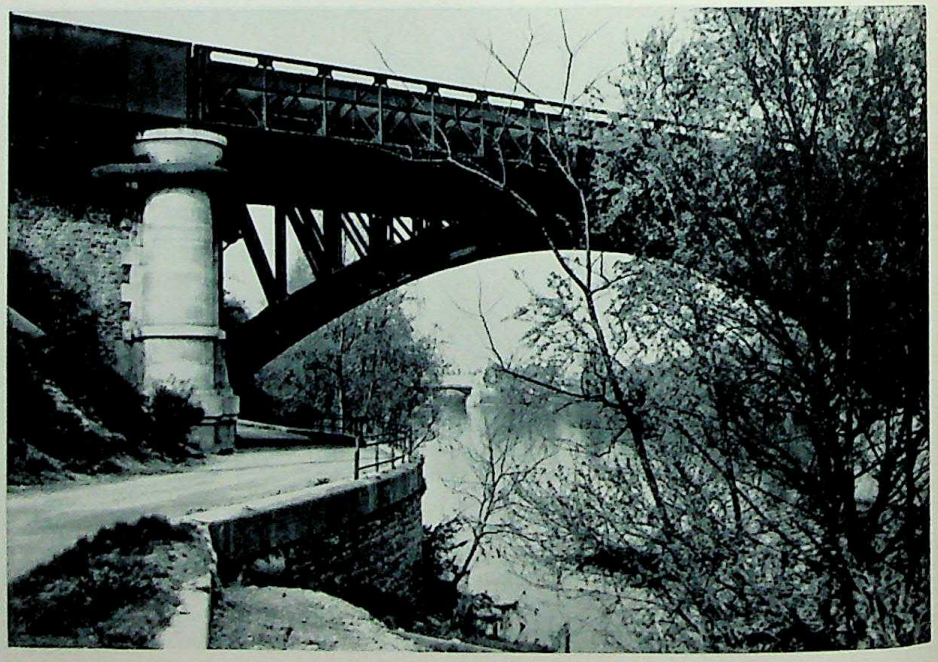
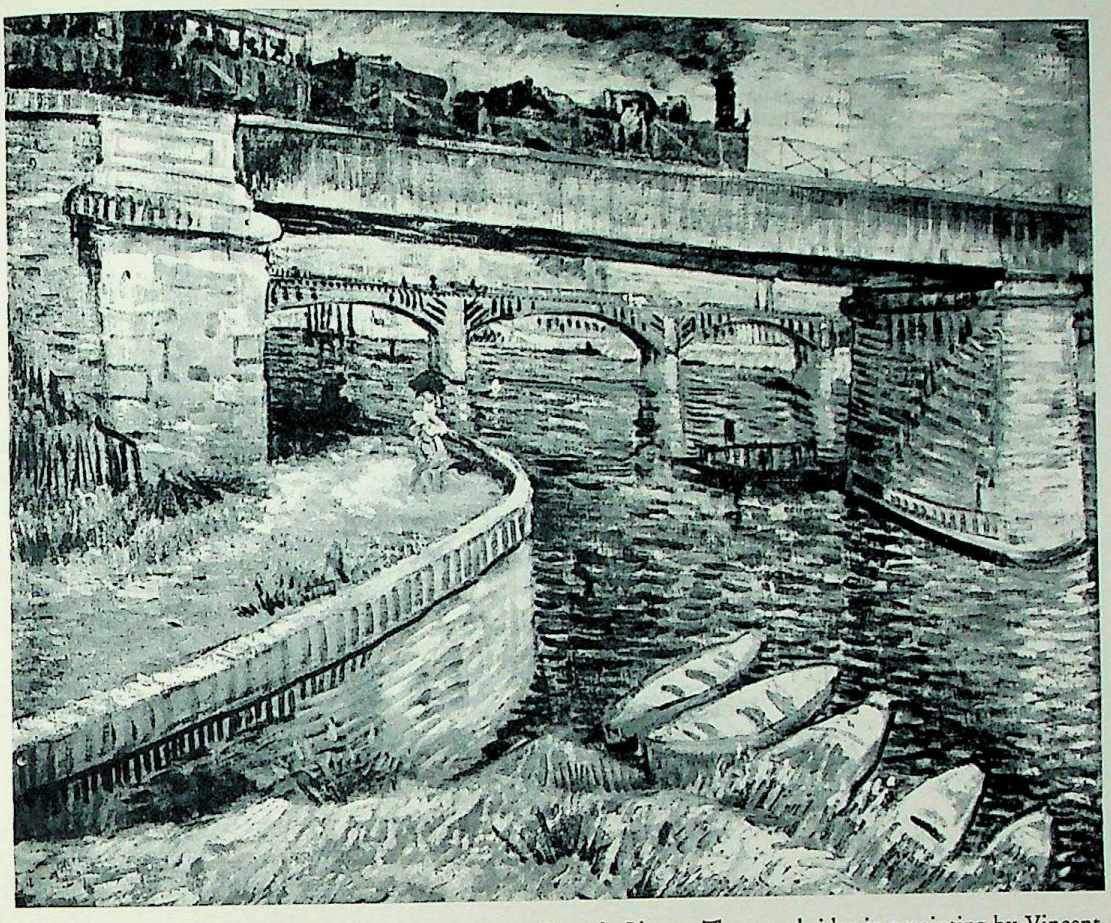
Emile Bernard and Toulouse-Lautrec

The two men were Emile Bernard and Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec. The latter needs no further description. His story and work are already well known all over the world. The other, Bernard, did not fulfil the promise that he showed in youth, but both filled a gap in Vincent's affections, shared in his moments of satisfaction and despair. He gave Toulouse-Lautrec his Pointillistic study of Paris, painted from his window.

Theo had met a young Dutchman, who was not a creative artist but who had cultivated his tastes and had an eye for good painting. He introduced Theo to Odilon Redon, who in his turn introduced him to a man who was to become



Photograph of the Bridge of Chatou. The bridge has been altered several tim



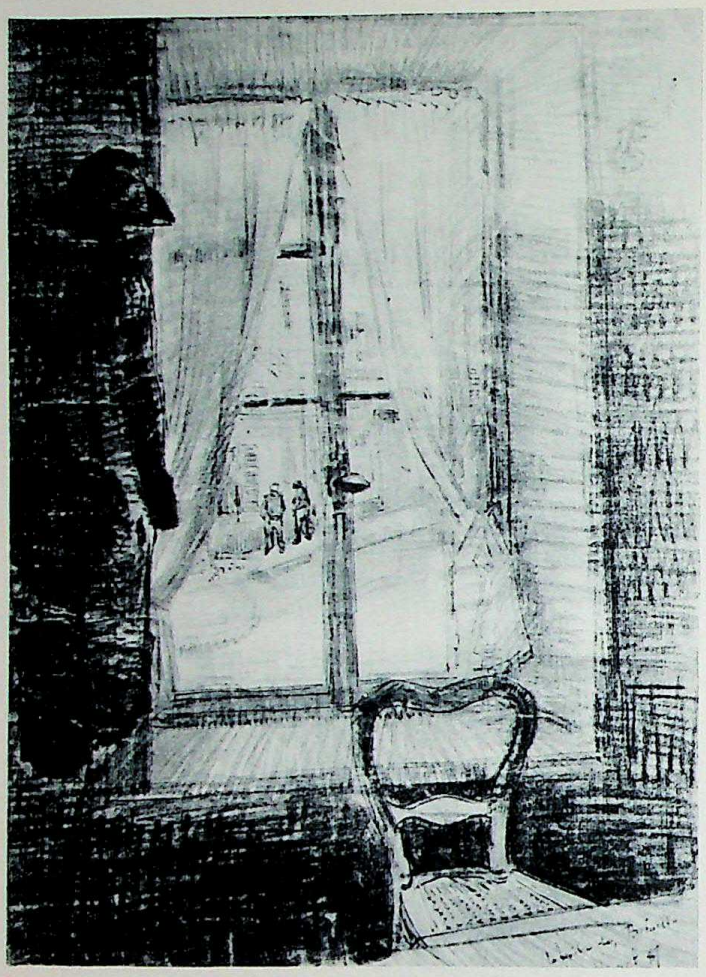
Le Pont de Chatou. The same bridge in a painting by Vincent

André Bonger

his life-long friend and make a third in the van Gogh circle, André Bonger. Three years later, Theo married his sister, Johanna. The three friends, Theo, Vincent and Dries, as they nicknamed Bonger, generally ate together in Madame Bataille's restaurant, near the van Goghs' lodgings.

Vincent was charmed with Montmartre, which at this time was still fairly rural and, above all, still had its windmills, reminiscent of his native countryside. He painted innumerable variations on this theme—the windmills in their characteristic setting. The Moulin de la Galette was his particular favourite: it was only round the corner from their lodgings and reappears in several pictures.

Looked at chronologically, the pictures show just how far Vincent had left his old style behind him. In his letters from Drente he had discussed again and again the question of matching figures to their background environment, but



Painting by Vincent of
The Window at
Bataille's, a café
where painters
often met

The place where 'Bataille's' used to be

Montmartre, painted by Vincent

by now he had gradually turned to a new, lighter colour-system. Many of his pictures are reminiscent of Mauve's style. Monet, Pissarro and Sisley were now his models, as far as colouring was concerned. He painted many flower-pieces —'to make his colours really fresh for his future pictures', wrote Theo to his mother. Every week, friends sent him large bouquets to paint from: he was much less reserved now and had enlarged his circle of friends considerably. The illness which had attacked him in Antwerp seemed to have been completely overcome.

Theo's difficulties with Vincent

But, improved as things were, Theo still had a lot to put up with, as can be seen from some of his letters.

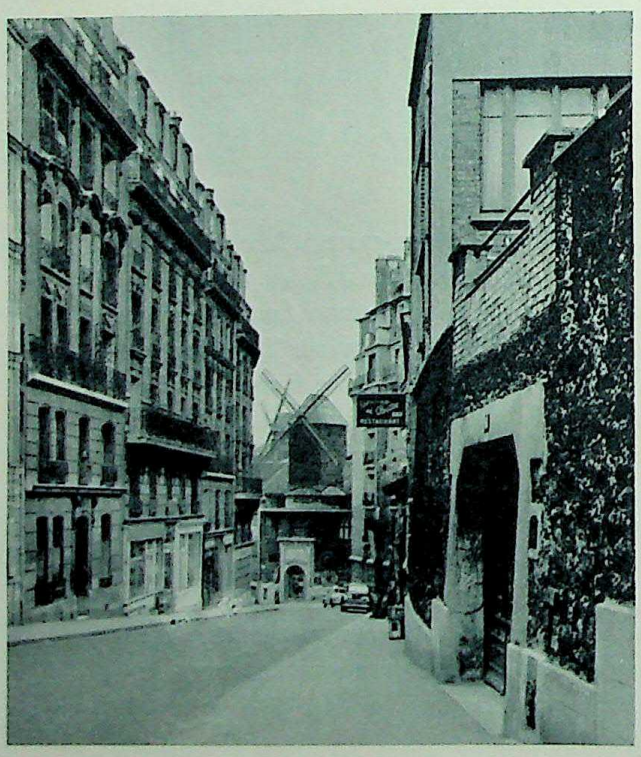
'I do hope [he wrote to his sister] that he will get rooms of his own. It is as though he were two men—one marvellously gifted, sensitive and tender, the other selfish and hard-hearted. It is a pity that he is his own worst enemy, for he makes his own life difficult as well as everyone else's.'

All the same, Theo was convinced of Vincent's real artistry and talent and, for their sake, tolerated all his brother's excesses, moods and injustices; and he saw how the Parisian atmosphere was making Vincent's art blossom although, knowing Vincent so well, he guessed that it would not be long before he moved off to fresh fields.

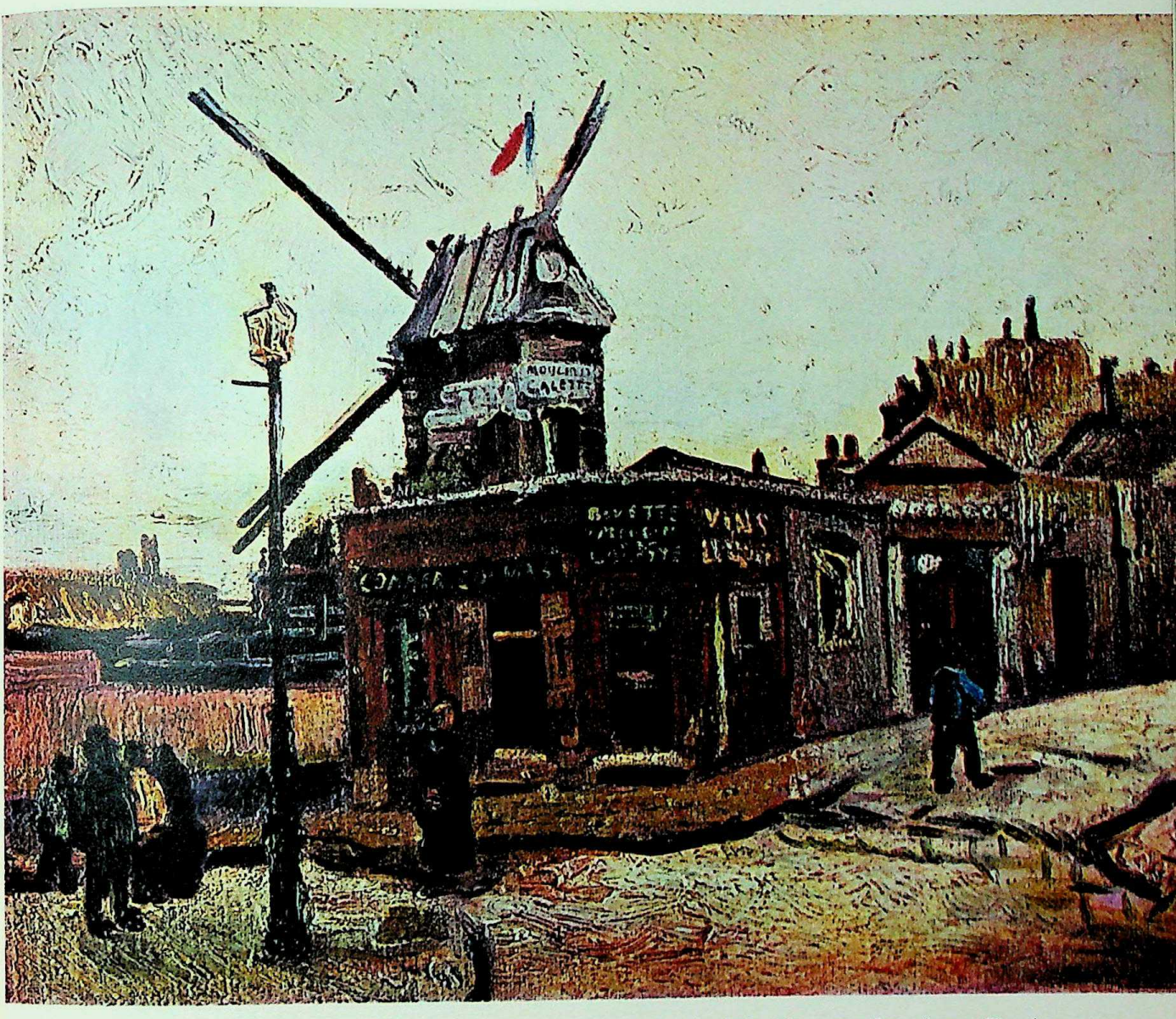
Two things in particular made Vincent turn towards a lighter range of colours—the scenery of the Butte Montmartre with its wide views, and the large number of flower-pieces he painted in the summer of 1886.

Impressionism

It is fascinating to see the way his style developed, gradually acquiring the rapier-like brush-strokes and light, bright tones which, in his later work, ring out from the canvas like trumpets. Monticelli's brushwork had given him the first impetus in this direction, and the Impressionists did the rest. In earlier days, writing to Theo, he had been rather disparaging about the Impressionists, but now he lived and worked side by side with them and could judge them more fairly than when he had been three hundred miles away.



Photograph of
'Le Moulin de la Galette'.



Le Moulin de la Galette, seen from the rue Girardon.

Self-portrait of Paul Gauguin with Bernard's portrait of him on the wall

In the *Guinguette* and other similar pictures, where he did not quite succeed in getting away from chiaroscuro, he was trying to imitate Manet. Later he took the Plein-airists and Pointillists as models. With touching simplicity he concentrated so hard on these styles that even experts sometimes have difficulty in distinguishing his landscapes from Pissarro's or Sisley's.

The 'Post-Impressionists'

When later he came to know Gauguin, Anquetin and their friends, he transferred his affections from the Impressionists to this new group who, for want of a better name, are called the Post-Impressionists. In their opinion, Impressionism was outdated and they favoured new artistic ideals and a new style of painting. Toulouse-Lautrec was one of their members. They met in a few small pubs in Montmartre and, over a fantastic quantity of alcohol, discussed, argued and defended themselves until the rafters rang. They were prepared to go through fire and water to defend their artistic ideals and, naturally enough, were no models of propriety in either speech or action, or they would hardly have had the courage to revolt against all accepted conventions. So they were just the friends for Vincent, who also never cared to

Self-portrait of Emile Bernard with Gauguin's portrait of him on the wall

mince his words or consider the *qu'en dira-t'on*. Every outspoken quarrel with his friends put new life into him.

Vincent in Paris was a different man from Vincent in Antwerp. Now that Theo had relieved him of most of his material worries, he could feel much freer as an artist. The physical and mental collapse of the past year had left few traces and he no longer gave the impression of being a shattered, inward-looking invalid. The dissatisfied, misanthropic pessimist turned into a lively talker with a good deal of humour and ironic wit, an interesting and well-read conversationalist. In short, it seemed as if in the cultural climate of Paris he could, for the first time, show himself as he really was.

In 1887 the group held an exhibition of their work in the Tambourin, a café on the Boulevard de Clichy, where they often met. On this occasion they called themselves the 'peintres du petit boulevard' in opposition to Monet, Sisley, Pissarro, Raffaelli, Degas, Seurat and others, who exhibited in the gallery of Boussod, Valadon & Co., on the Boulevard Montmartre, or 'grand Boulevard'.

Vincent probably had an affair with the manageress of the Tambourin,

by John P. Russell, an Australian
Portrait of van Gogh

Vincent van Gogh, pastel by Toulouse-Lautrec

La femme au Tambourin

La Segatori, for a while. In his later letters from Arles he often mentions her, but mostly in connexion with a quarrel over some of his paintings wich she refused to give up after they had broken with each other. He painted her in *La Femme au Tambourin* and Toulouse-Lautrec in *Poudre-de-Riz.*

Toulouse-Lautrec paints Vincent

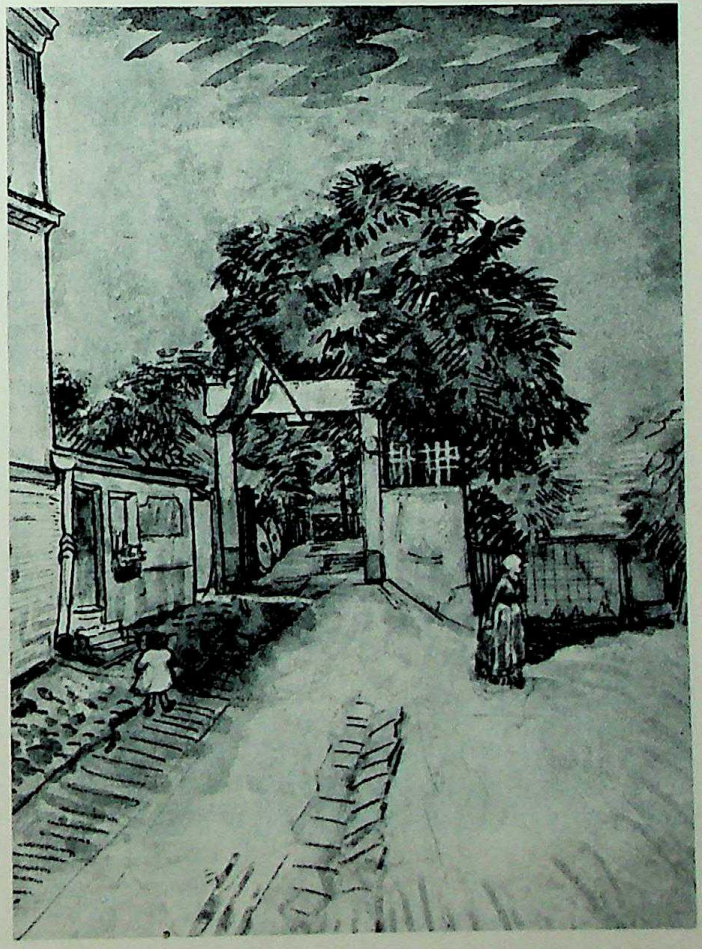
It was probably in the Tambourin, too, that Toulouse-Lautrec drew Vincent sitting at a table, leaning slightly forward with his Pernod in front of him, his hands on the table and his eyes fixed in concentration on some object out of sight. A portrait of him had already been painted in Paris by the Australian, Russell, a friend with whom he continued to correspond long after he had left the city.

One of the topics which most interested Vincent's circle was Japanese colour-prints and the possibilities they opened up for Impressionism. Students of nineteenth-century art have long realized the importance of the *Crépon,* a Japanese scroll, to the period. Long after Vincent had left Paris for Arles he often mentioned Japanese art and its influence on his work, in his letters.

When he had been two months in Paris the *Paris Illustré* published a special number on Japan, with articles on Japanese art in general and Hokusai and the masters of the Ukiyo-e School in particular. That Vincent saw the magazine is certain, not only because it is still in the possession of his heirs but because he made a tracing of the colour-print reproduction on the cover, intending to use it as the basis of a painting.

Japanese art

In Antwerp he had been too taken up with other problems to be able to concentrate fully on the importance of Japanese art for new trends in Western painting, but in Paris he spared the time to give it his full attention and distil new ideas for his own work from it. He sat for days in Bing's shop which had imported large numbers of prints, studying them and sorting out the best. Theo, already a reliable connoisseur of art, also admired them and agreed that one



Gate with Flag, drawn in 1887 in honour of 14 July, the French national holiday

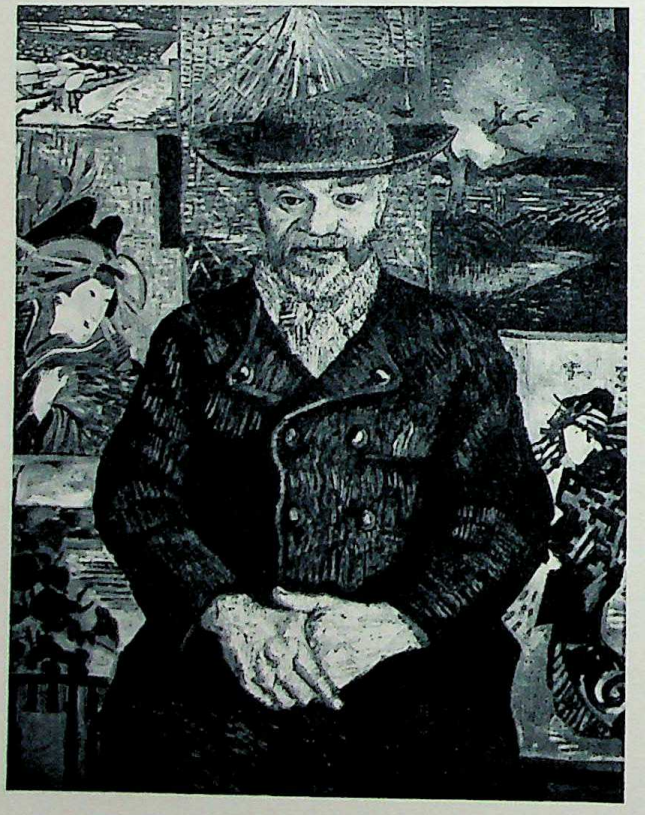
ought to collect them. Slowly Vincent became familiar with the various elements of this art—the script, the visual conventions, composition, colouring and other characteristics of the style. He attempted various imitations himself and, when he was fully prepared, wanted to try out his new style somewhere where the bright sunlight heightened every colour to a new purity and intensity. He wanted a 'French Japan' and he found it at last in the South of France, in Provence.

Departure for the south

On 21 February 1888, after two years in Paris, he left for Arles.

During the first weeks he lived in Carrel's Hotel-Restaurant in the rue Cavalerie; the house was destroyed in the last war. He had an attic room with

The Actor, painted by Vincent after Kesai Yeisen



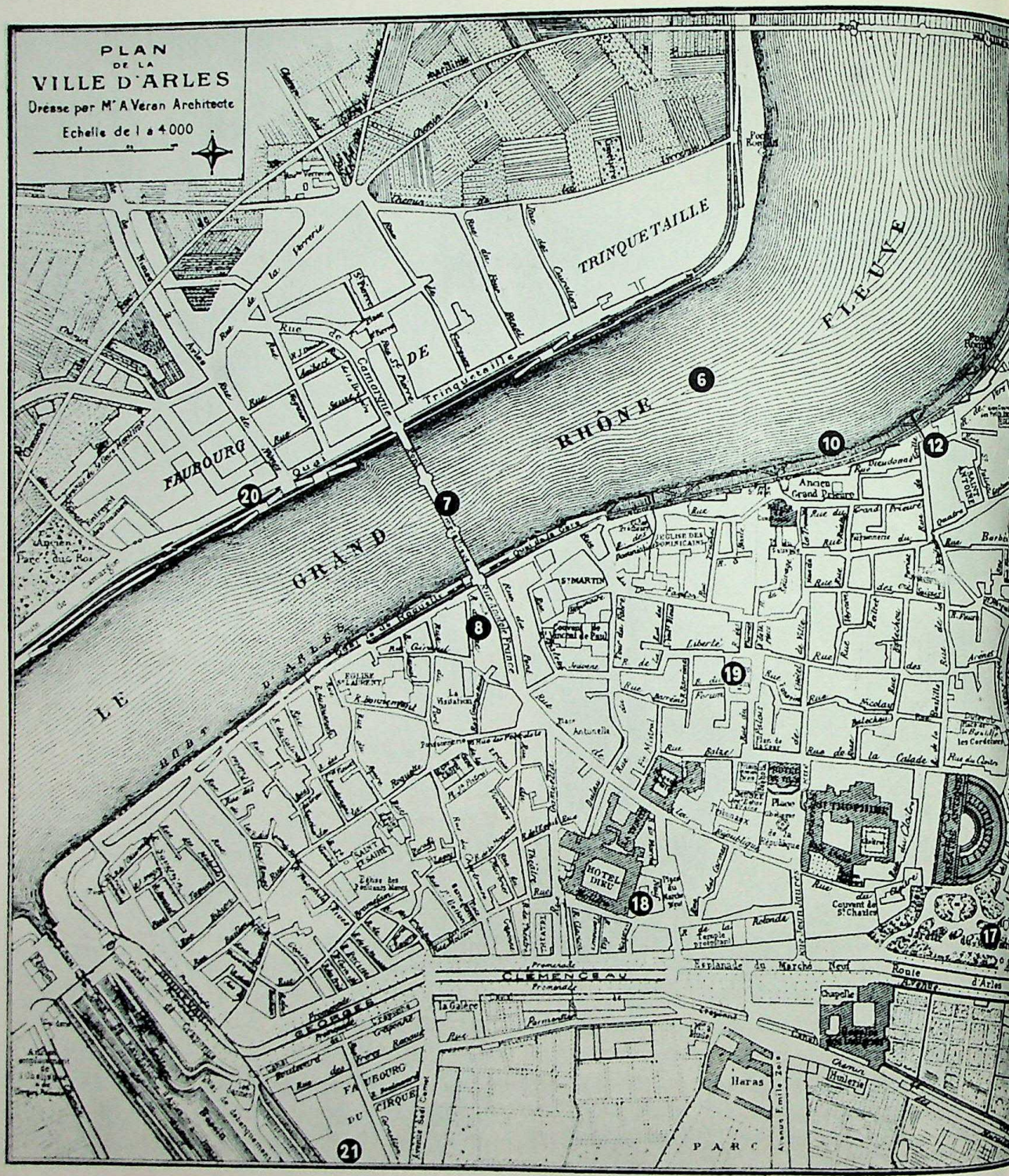
Le Père Tanguy with Kesai Yeisen's *Actor* in the background

Plum Trees in Blossom,
by Vincent after Hiroshige

The Bridge,
by Vincent after Hiroshige

a window looking to the whole panorama of the town with its Roman arena and churches—a scene he painted and sketched more than once, with amazing exactitude.

In spite of everything he was still a countryman and felt reinvigorated, after his long stay in the big city, by the fresh Provençal countryside. He began to work with even greater energy. But, altruistically, he did not forget his friends, particularly those in financial difficulties, and played with the idea of forming a society which would share the profits from its paintings equally among all its


PLAN
DE LA
VILLE D'ARLES
Dressé par Mr A Véran Architecte
Echelle de 1 à 4000
TRINQUETAILLE
FLEUVE
RHÔNE
GRAND
FAUBOURG
Quai
Rue de la Cavalerie
Rue de la Roquette
Rue de la Calade
Rue de la Liberté
Rue Nicolay
Rue Balze
Rue Réattu
Rue Jean Jaurès
Rue Antonelle
Rue Portagnel
Rue Vauvenargues
Rue Diderot
Rue Dulaurens
Rue Porte de Laure
Rue Voltaire
Rue Cloître
Rue Grande Prieuré
Rue Dominicains
Rue Balechou
Rue Parmentier
Rue Pierre Vialar
Rue Docteur Fanton
Rue Docteur Rayne
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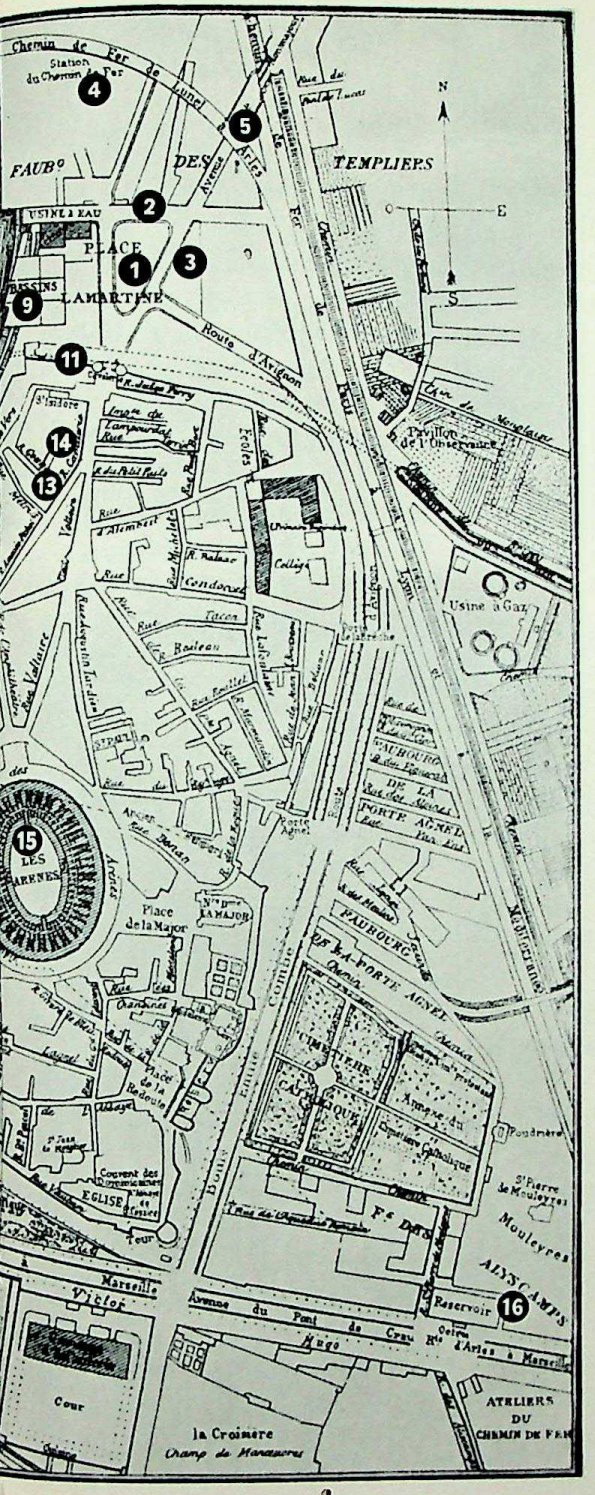
Chemin de Fer
Station du Chemin de Fer
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DES
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Ecoles
Usine à Gaz
Pavillon de l'Observance
Place de la Major
Place de la Redoute
Couvent des Dominicains
EGLISE
Marseille
Cour
la Croisière
Champ de Manœuvres
ATELIERS DU CHEMIN DE FER
Avenue du Pont de Crau
Route d'Arles à Marseille
Réservoir
Poudrière
St Pierre de Mouleyres
Mouleyres
ALYSCAMPS
LES ARENES
FAUBOURG DE LA PORTE AGNEL
Porte Agnel
Rue Jean Jaurès
Rue Lafayette
Rue Voltaire
Rue Condorcet
Rue d'Alembert
Rue Boileau
Rue Titien
Rue Pasteur
Rue Diderot
Rue Victor Hugo
Rue Gambetta
Rue Portagnel
Rue Dr Rey
Rue Docteur Fanton
Rue Docteur Jean Reattu
Rue Docteur Jean Mas
Rue Docteur Jean Baptiste Long
Rue Docteur Jean Baptiste Long
Rue Docteur Jean Baptiste Long

members. An artist had to be free of material worries. As he walked about the town and countryside, his thoughts returned continuously to this idea.

He had arrived in Arles just in time to find the fruit trees covered in their brilliant pink and white blossom. Feverishly he painted a series of pictures of them, and it was while he was still busy with this subject that he heard the sad news of Mauve's death. Typically, he made his mourning the occasion of a marvellous picture. Under a study of peach trees in blossom he wrote: 'Souvenir de Mauve, Vincent et Theo', including his brother in this dedication to the man who had directed his first steps in art.

Mauve's death

'It is, perhaps, the best landscape that I have [he wrote of the picture]. If you agree, we can send it, from both of us, to Frau Mauve. I purposely chose the best study that I have painted. I don't know what they will say about it at home, but that makes no difference to us and, to my mind, Mauve's memory deserves something tender and gay.'

When all the spring blossom had faded, he painted a landscape with the wooden bridge, the *Pont de Langlois*, twisted popularly to *Pont de l'Anglais*. The bridge reminded him of similar ones at home in Belgium.

It worried him that he had to spend a large part of the monthly allowance Theo sent him on board and lodging. Living at Carrel's, he was often short of money for painting materials. He was much better pleased when he managed to rent one half of a two-storey house in the Place Lamartine for fifteen francs a month. He was now the proud possessor of four rooms, two large and two small.

The 'Yellow House'

The interior was whitewashed, the outside painted yellow; Vincent christened the building 'The Yellow House'—a name which in Japanese art and culture had the additional, symbolic meaning of 'House of Friendship'.

The Yellow House was not only a cheaper means of accommodation; it also seemed to bring nearer the fulfilment of a long-standing ambition—the idea of starting a miniature artists' colony, where he could surround himself with a group of kindred spirits and talk shop as much as he wanted.

And then, for once, he felt secure. So many times in the past he had wistfully painted bees in their hives, weavers at their looms, birds in their nests—all the creatures with a fixed point to attach themselves to, unlike himself, the outcast. Now he, too, had a fixed point, a home of his own and his dreams were already envisaging a companion living with him in it—the end of solitude as well as the end of insecurity. So he furnished it for two occupants, writing excited

The Yellow House
in a modern photograph

Van Gogh's House at Arles
in a water-colour

letters to Theo about it all the time. And, of course, the paintings of this time were full of the house; one of Vincent's best known and most admired pictures is of the bedroom, with bed, toilet table and two chairs.

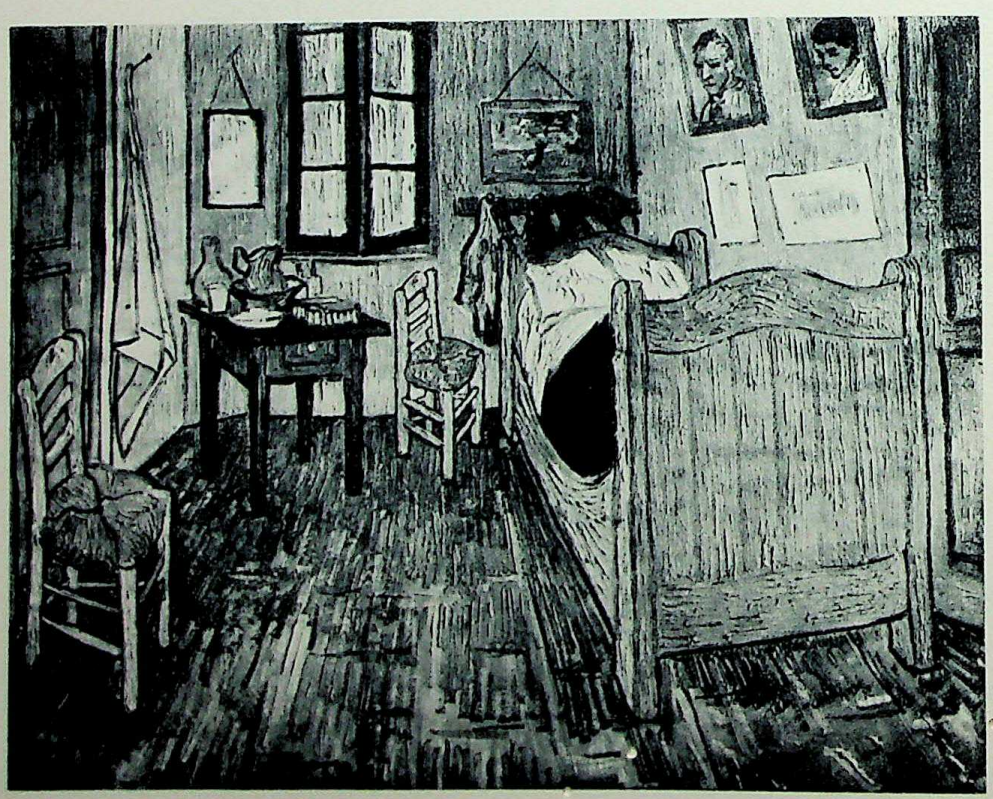
His bedroom

As soon as he saw the effect of the Provençal light on the landscape he was convinced that with oils he could immeasurably intensify the contrasts in the Japanese colour-prints. The prints could not reproduce the mysterious shimmer of light as a brush and canvas could. The *Crépon* could not show the contrast between deep blue and light yellow as he could show it in a painting of the Café Térrasse under a night sky sprinkled with golden stars.

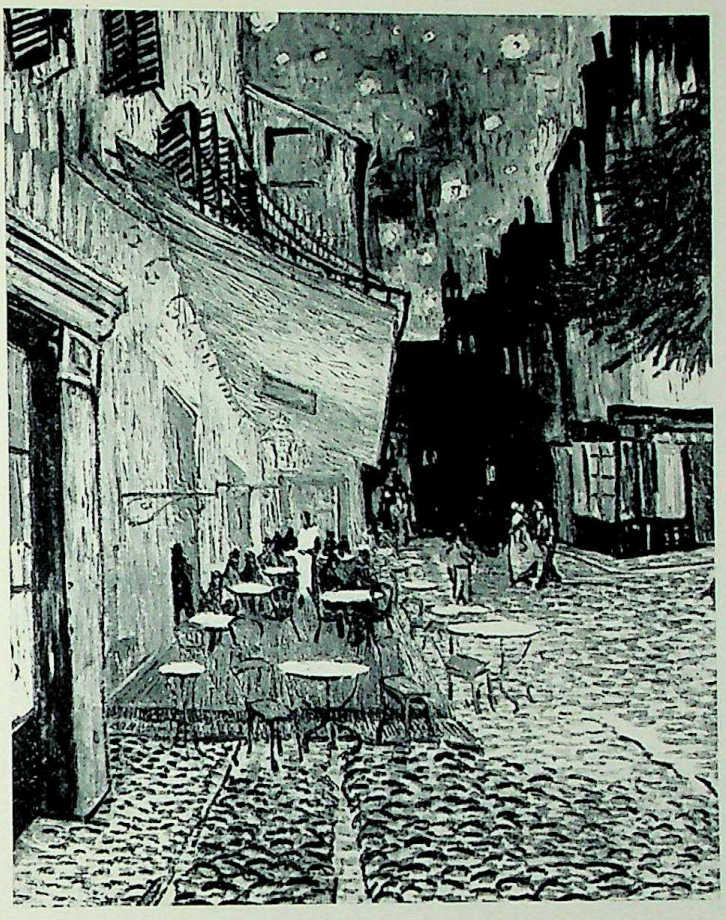
He wanted to try it out. In the dark he would not be able to distinguish the colours on his palette, let alone the fine nuances he was putting on the canvas. But what else could he do? It had to be painted from nature, in other words, in the dark.

A strange character

One evening, the citizens of Arles were startled by the sight of a peculiar looking individual striding along, carrying all kinds of apparatus under both



Van Gogh's Room in the Yellow House



Café Terrace at Night
(Place du Forum)

arms, a wooden box on his back, a broad-brimmed hat with wax candles attached to it on his head. He set up his easel at the Place du Forum and lit more candles along the top of it and at both sides. Then be began to paint.

The next day all Arles was talking about the strange doings of 'the red-haired madman', but with no idea, of course, that they had seen the birth of a masterpiece. Little did they realize that in this picture Vincent had succeeded in combining East and West, the language of the Japanese colour-prints and the European artistic tradition.

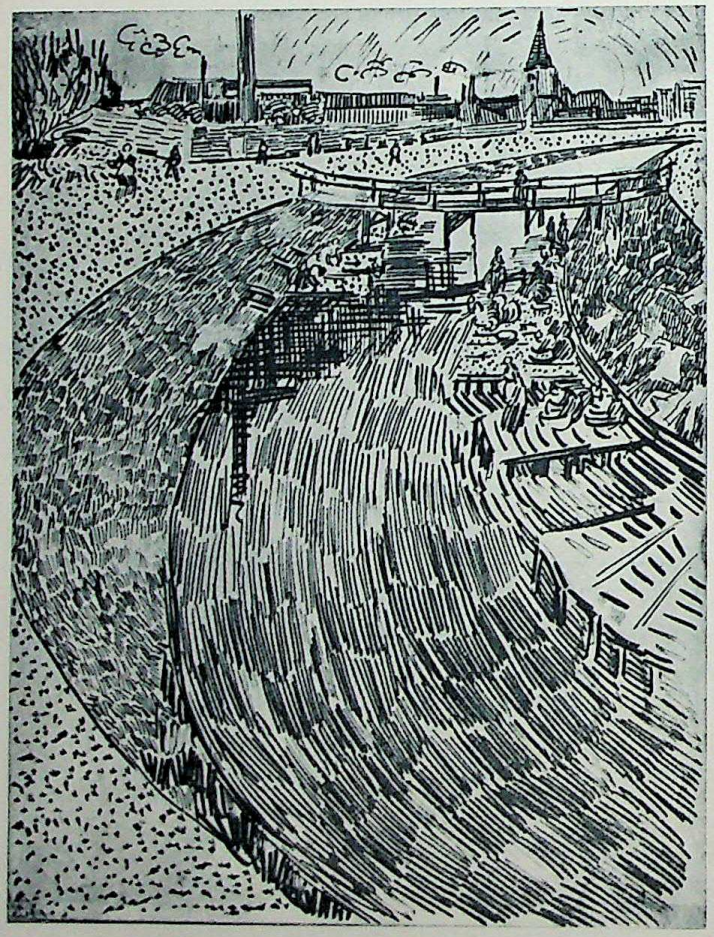
In the previous June he had spent a week at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, a small fishing village on the Mediterranean, about twenty miles south of Arles,

where he had painted *The Boats on the Beach* and made many pen-and-ink drawings. The drawings—*La Roubine du Roy,* for instance, or *Les Cabanes des Gardiens*—show how much the work of Hokusai and other Japanese masters had helped him to find a personal, energetic and conscious style.

Reed-pen drawings

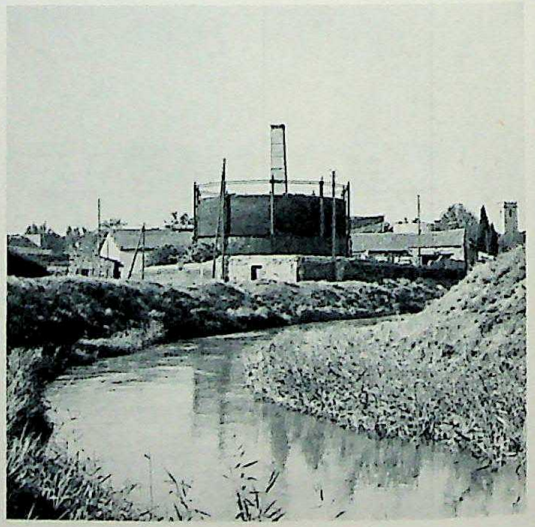
He knew now that he had developed a style of his own, just as he had always wanted, and he felt immensely encouraged. He knew that his paintings were drawings in brush and paint, his drawings paintings in charcoal or pen and ink. The *View of Arles* is typical of this painting-drawing and the pen-and-ink drawings he made in Montmajour are done in exactly the same way, made up of the same dots and straight and crooked lines, although in another medium.

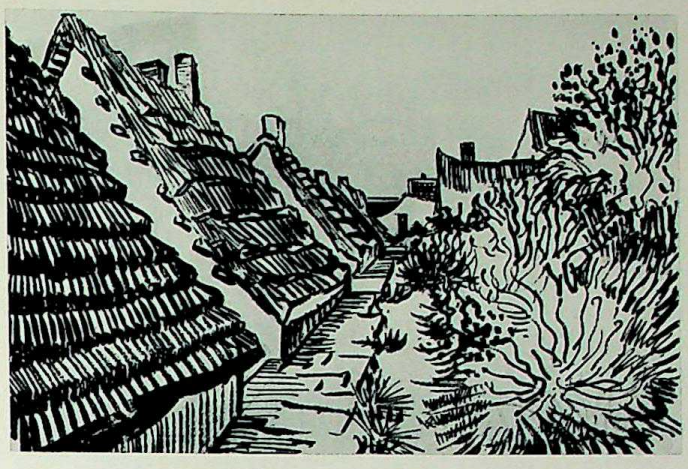
This parallel development of a drawing and painting style was something completely new. One has to go far back into the past to find anything like it.



Washerwomen
(La Roubine du Roy)

Photograph of
'La Roubine du Roy'

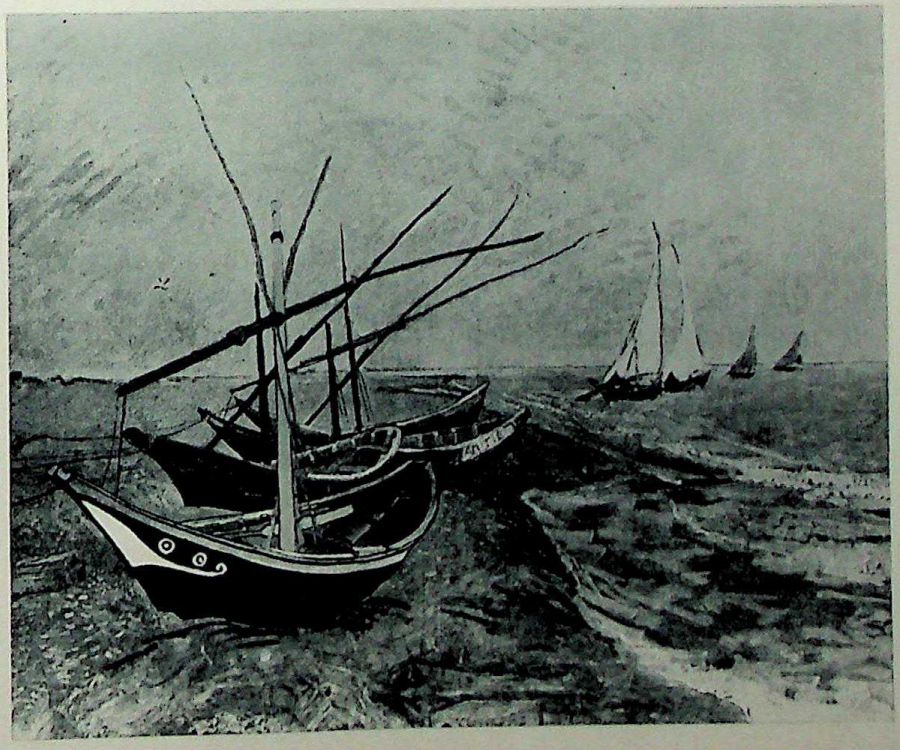




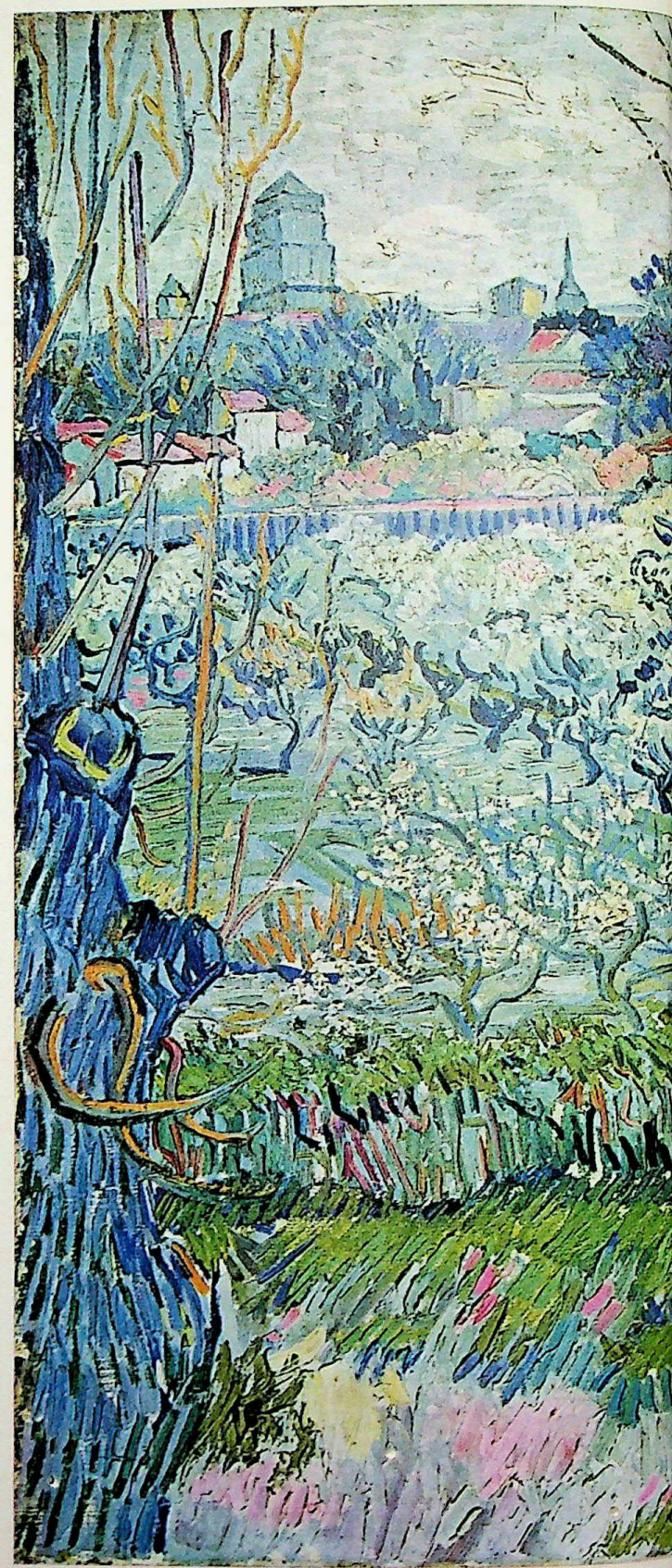
Hovels at Saintes-Maries
(the cottages of cowherds in the Camargue)

The elements he used with such virtuosity were extremely simple in themselves —only lines and dots combined to form various tone-values. In fact, his style was a very personal, very expressive *pointillisme*.

Vincent's achievement sounds quite simple, described now after the event, but before him no European artist had used these methods and Hokusai, who had done something very similar, had left no account of what it had cost him to learn this technique. It has been claimed that something similar is to be found in the work of Hercules Seghers, a seventeenth-century fellow-countryman of Vincent's, but a close examination of Segher's work shows that the

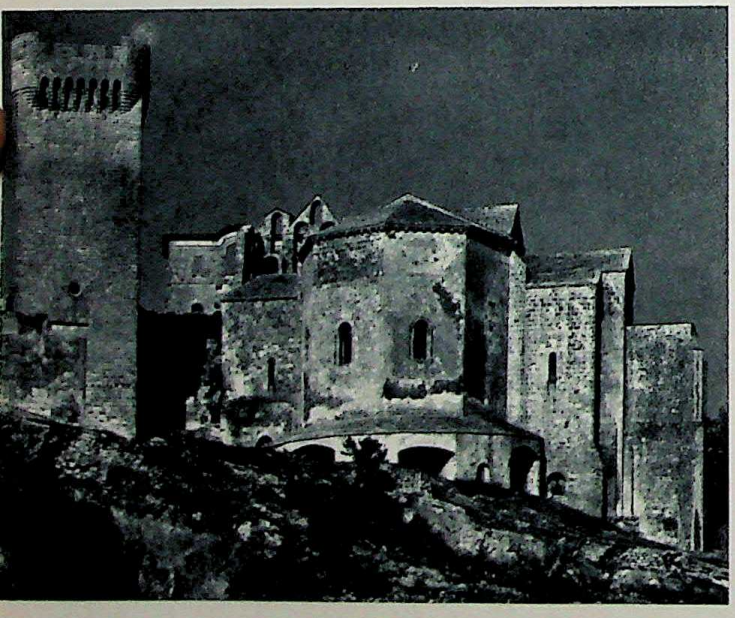


Boats on the Beach
(Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer)

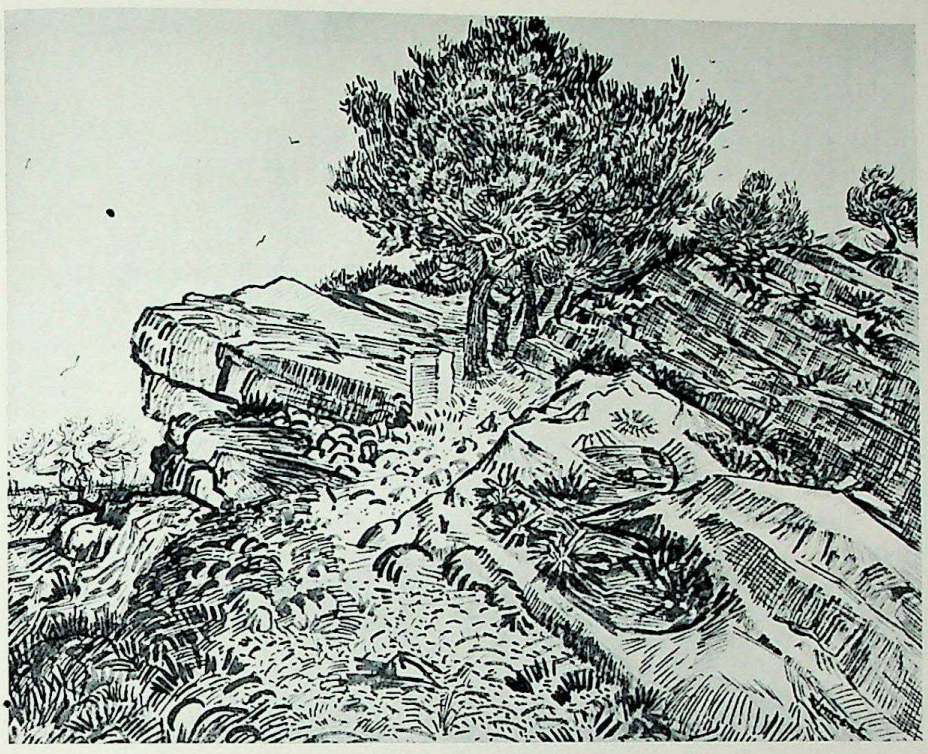


View of Arles,
painted in April 1888

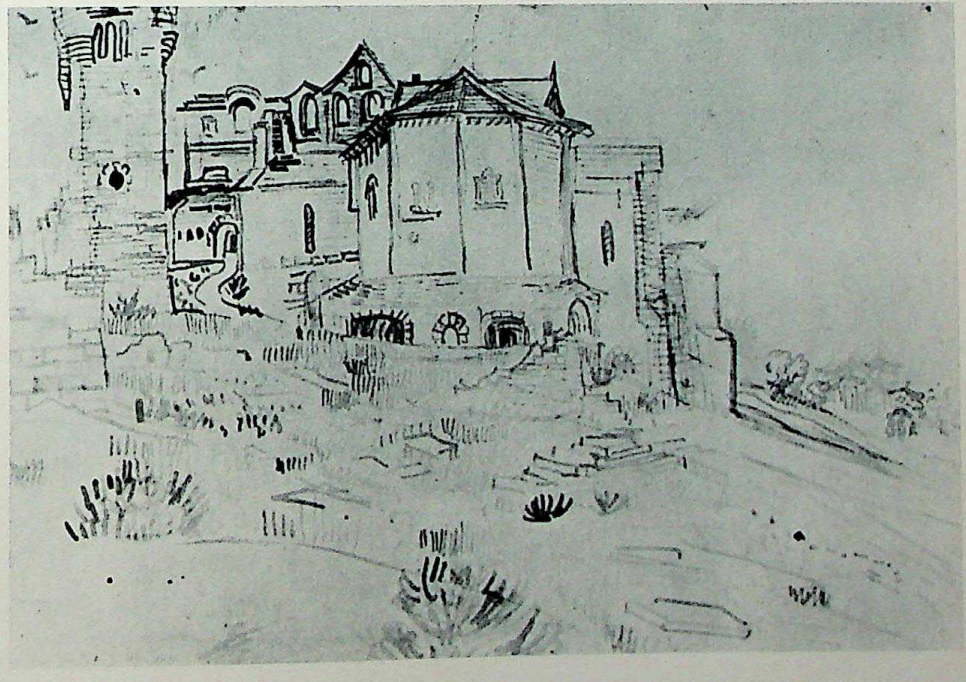
Rocks near Montmajour



The ruins at Montmajour



Crag, drawn by van Gogh at Montmajour in July 1888



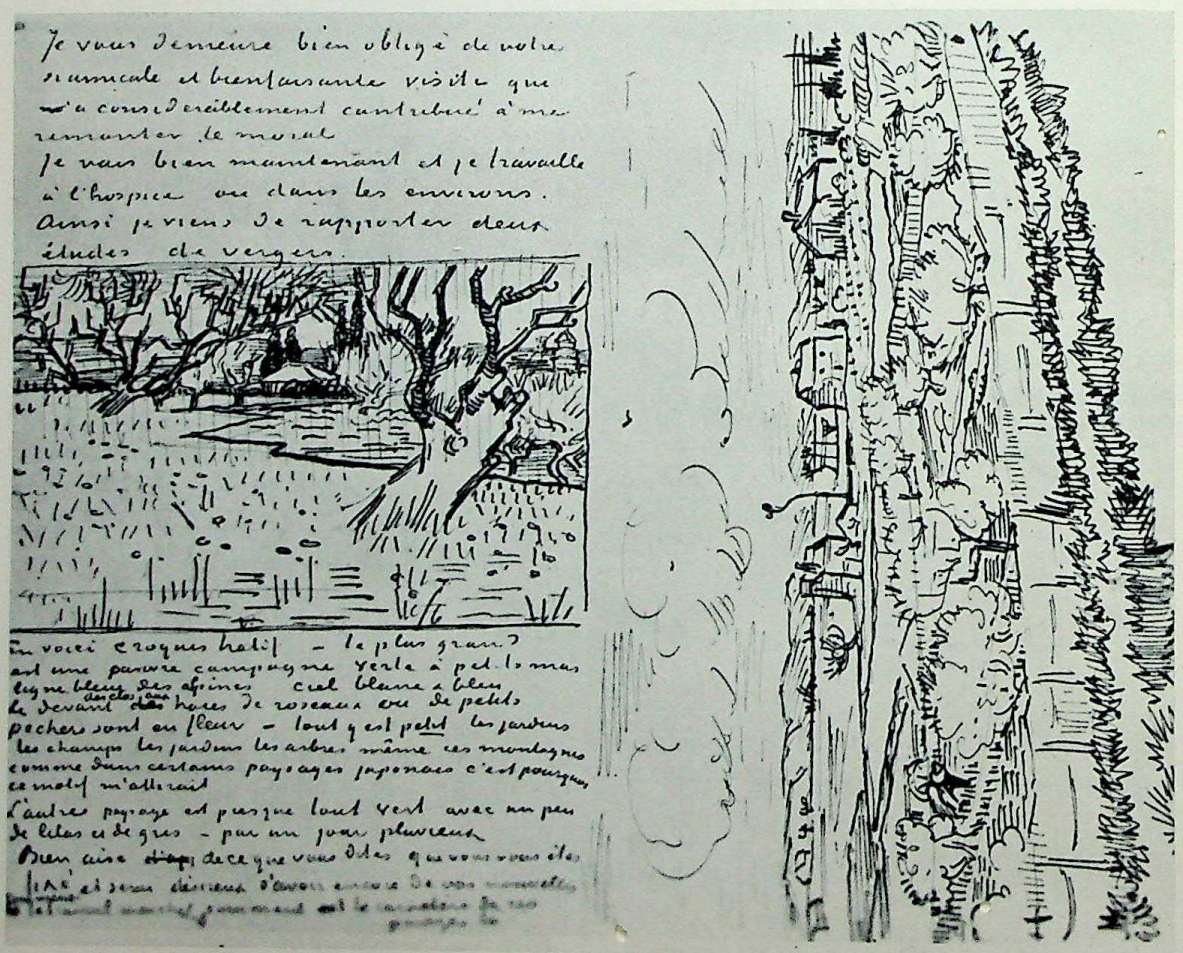
Vincent drew the choir of the church at Montmajour, with the graves set in the rocky ground around it

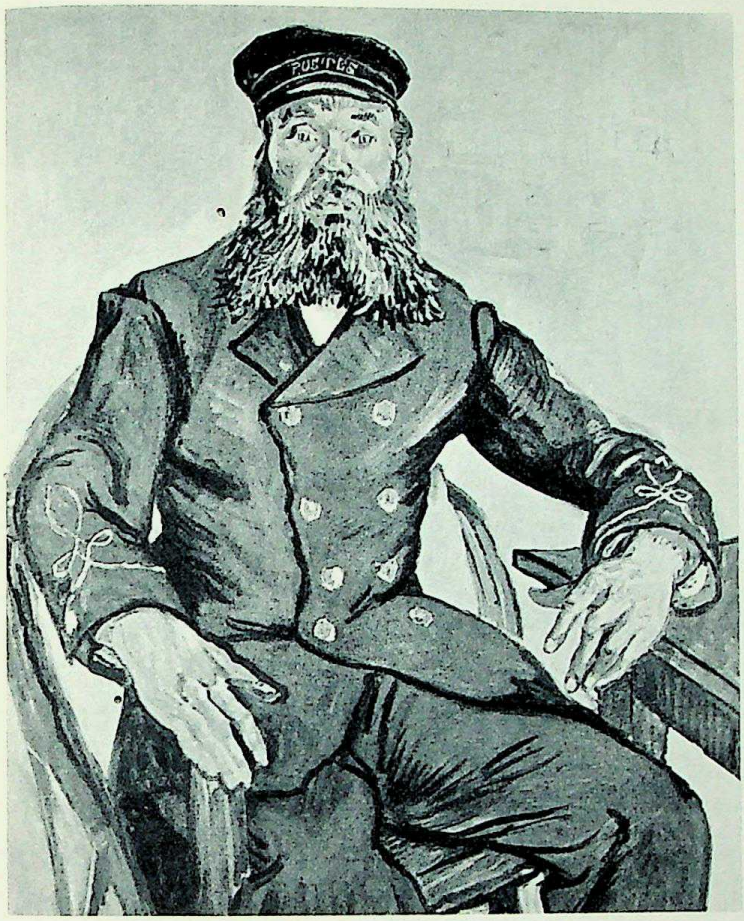
integration of drawing and painting was far less developed than with Vincent, and, in the light of Vincent's self-taught quality and the influences which led him to a fusion of Western tradition and Eastern elements, Seghers' work is obviously on a vastly different level and more akin to the traditional landscape painting of the Rembrandt circle.

Vincent as a correspondent

Judging from Vincent's correspondence—three stout volumes—with Theo and Emile Bernard, writing came almost as easily to him as did painting. Nevertheless, sometimes he helped out verbal description with little sketches of details or whole paintings, and these are wonderfully complete and evocative, despite the primitive materials used and the speed of the drawing.

In the meanwhile, Vincent had made friends with two men with whom he could relax in the evening after his hard day's work. The first was a postman with a full, impressive beard and the philosophic expression of a Socrates. He sat to him for hour after hour, doing him thereby a great service, for models


Je vous dernière bien obligé de votre
amicale et bienfaisante visite qui
m'a considérablement contribué à me
remonter le moral
Je vais bien maintenant et je travaille
à l'hospice ou dans les environs.
Ainsi je viens de rapporter deux
études de vergers.
Un voici croquis hâtif - le plus grand
est une pauvre campagne verte à pel-mêle
ligne bleue des alpines ciel bleuâtre à bleu
le devant des haies de roseaux avec de petits
pêchers sont en fleur - tout y est petit les jardins
les champs les jardins les arbres même les montagnes
comme dans certains paysages japonais c'est pourquoi
ce motif m'attirait
l'autre paysage est presque tout vert avec un peu
de lilas et de gris - par un jour pluvieux
Bien aise de ce que vous êtes



The Postman Roulin

Portrait of Armand Roulin,
the postman's eldest son

◀ Two pages of a letter to Paul Signac
with two pen and ink sketches

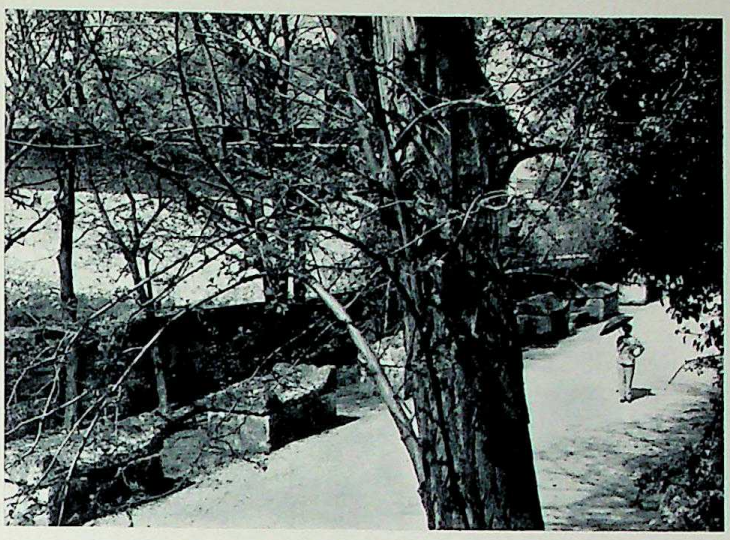
Portrait of Lieutenant Milliet.

were hard to find. Moreover, he also put his whole family at Vincent's disposal and Vincent made many portraits of his wife and all his children.

The other new friend was a second lieutenant in the Zouaves called Milliet who came to Vincent originally because he wanted to learn painting. Vincent's portrait of him is one of his greatest successes.

Arrival of Gauguin

A third figure also played a large part in Vincent's life from the very beginning of his stay in Arles. This was Gauguin, whom Vincent longed to have as a companion and about whom he wrote incessantly in his letters to Theo. (As



Les Alyscamps,
the Roman Road at Arles

Les Alyscamps in Autumn, painted in November 1888

an art dealer, Theo took a certain interest in Gauguin.) If only Gauguin would come, it would be the beginning of his society of French artists ('it would be like the society of the twelve English Pre-Raphaelites,' he wrote to Theo). At that time Gauguin was still painting in Brittany and was in a bad way generally. Wouldn't it be cheaper and more convenient if he came and stayed with Vincent in the Yellow House? Theo, who by now was supporting Gauguin too, at Vincent's urgent request, would then have to pay only one rent. In return, Gauguin could give Theo his pictures to sell. From May to October, Vincent thought and wrote of little else. Finally, on 20 October, Gauguin arrived at the Yellow House and settled in.

They shared the cooking and cleaning and spent the whole day painting, on one occasion in the Alyscamps side by side, but looking in different directions. In the evenings they strolled through the brothel quarter of the town which was situated nearby.

At first everything went well. They went for a trip to Montpellier to visit the museum and saw, among other things, Courbet's *Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet*, which inspired Gauguin to paint his *Bonjour, Monsieur Gauguin*. On another occasion, Gauguin did a portrait of Vincent sitting painting the famous *Sunflowers* but, by 23 December, the atmosphere was already deteriorating; Vincent wrote to Theo that Gauguin seemed to be disappointed in Arles, the Yellow House and himself.

Sunflowers

What actually happened? The letters are vague but, considering the tempestuous characters of both artists, it is easy to imagine the heated quarrels about art and life which in the end put an insuperable barrier between them. It was bound to happen.

Gauguin's questionable character

It was not friendship for Vincent that had brought Gauguin—cynical, unscrupulous in all but art, selfish, arrogant and immoral—to the Yellow House, the House of Friendship. Indeed, in view of his almost criminal egoism, it seems doubtful whether Gauguin was even capable of real friendship, comradeship or love, whether he knew any other passion but insatiable ambition. Some of his letters to Daniel de Montfried are almost frightening in their brutal, unashamed egoism.

No, it was only the force of necessity that drove Gauguin to Arles—necessity and the knowledge that he was conferring a favour on Theo, who was the one man who could sell his pictures for a reasonable price.

He was no more interested in Vincent's genius than were Breitner or Cézanne. He could see that Vincent was a hard worker with some original and a few peculiar ideas, and he hoped to put these to good use in time, as he had Bernard's *cloisonné* technique (painting with outlines like coloured mosaic), which

he had adopted without the slightest acknowledgment and given out as his own invention.

He and Vincent had totally opposed ideas about painting. He aimed at a completely stylized reality, a synthesis of nature and imagination. Vincent, on the other hand, thought that the greater the faithfulness to reality, the higher the spiritual achievement. In short, they had no common ground at all.

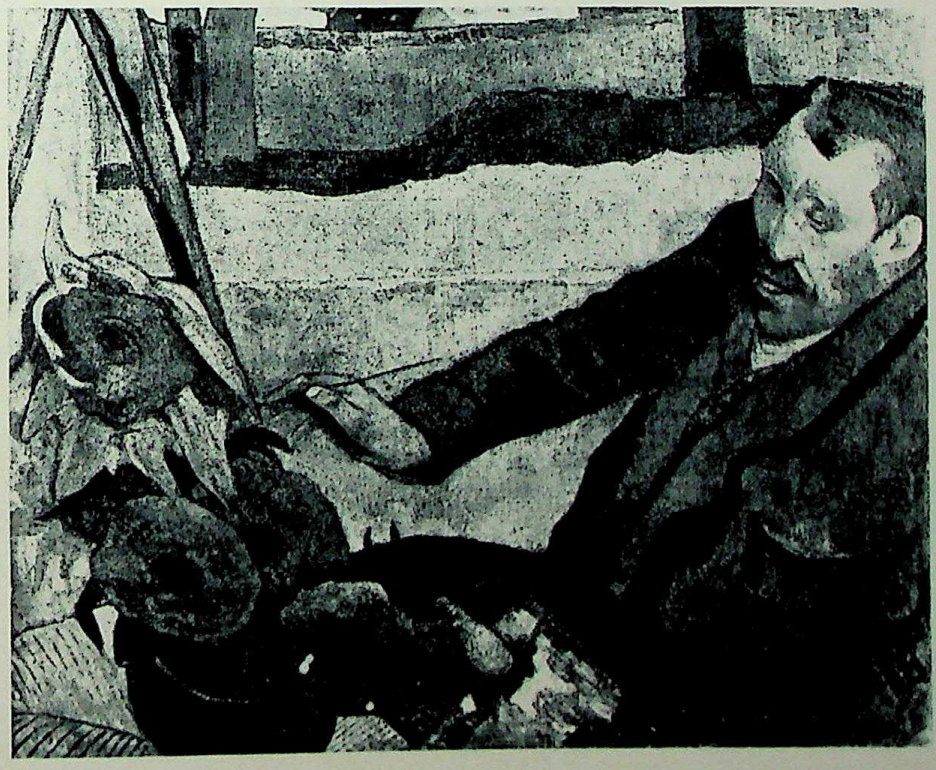
Disputes

All the blame must not be laid at Gauguin's door. Vincent was not an easy person to live with. He had faults, just as Gauguin had compensating qualities. His tendency towards extremes, for instance, and the obstinacy which made him cling to an argument for its own sake must have made him almost as unbearable to Gauguin as Gauguin's aggressive and calculating character made him to Vincent.

The catastrophe

Nothing good could come of their living and working together; an explosion was bound to occur sooner or later. It actually happened just before midnight on the very day when Vincent wrote to Theo about Gauguin's dissatisfaction.

The facts of the affair are not easy to disentangle. The eye-witnesses carried them with them to the grave and, although Gauguin himself gave an account of the incident fifteen years later in his book *Avant et Après*, his evidence is by no means reliable. As early as 1914 Johanna van Gogh-Bonger warned scholars



Vincent van Gogh, painted by Gauguin

against this 'mixture of fact and fiction' and when Gauguin's reliability was thoroughly investigated it was shown that the greater part of his 'explanations' were pure inventions. For what it is worth, however, his story was that he and Vincent had been drinking together in a public house when suddenly Vincent had thrown a glass at his head and threatened him with a razor.

Vincent himself never gave a full explanation in his letters although he was deeply sorry for what had happened.

The only people who really could have thrown any light on the affair were the other visitors to the 'Brothel No. 1', the official title of the establishment, used mostly by soldiers from the garrison, where the incident took place. The name occurs frequently in the police records but, as the case was never officially investigated, no more detailed examination was made.

The second act of the tragedy is a little better documented. The report in the local paper, *Le Forum Républicain*, gives at least two reliable facts—that Vincent wounded his ear and that he was taken to hospital. The rest of the account

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LE

FORUM RÉPUBLICAIN

JOURNAL DE L'ARRONDISSEMENT D'ARLES

Paraissant tous les Dimanches

Chronique locale

— Dimanche dernier, à 11 heures 1/2 du soir, le nommé Vincent Vaugogh, peintre, originaire de Hollande, s'est présenté à la maison de tolérance n° 1, a demandé la nommée Rachel, et lui a remis. . . . son oreille en lui disant : « Gardez cet objet précieusement. Puis il a disparu. Informée de ce fait qui ne pouvait être que celui d'un pauvre aliéné, la police s'est rendue le lendemain matin chez cet individu qu'elle a trouvé couché dans son lit, ne donnant presque plus signe de vie.

Ce malheureux a été admis d'urgence à l'hospice.

News item in *Le Forum Républicain*

Dr Rey of the Arles Hospital

is more or less worthless. It states that late the same night Vincent gave his ear to a certain Rachel who worked in the brothel, saying: 'Guard this with your life'—a typical piece of Mediterranean dramatic embellishment. In any case, Vincent had only cut off his left ear-lobe.

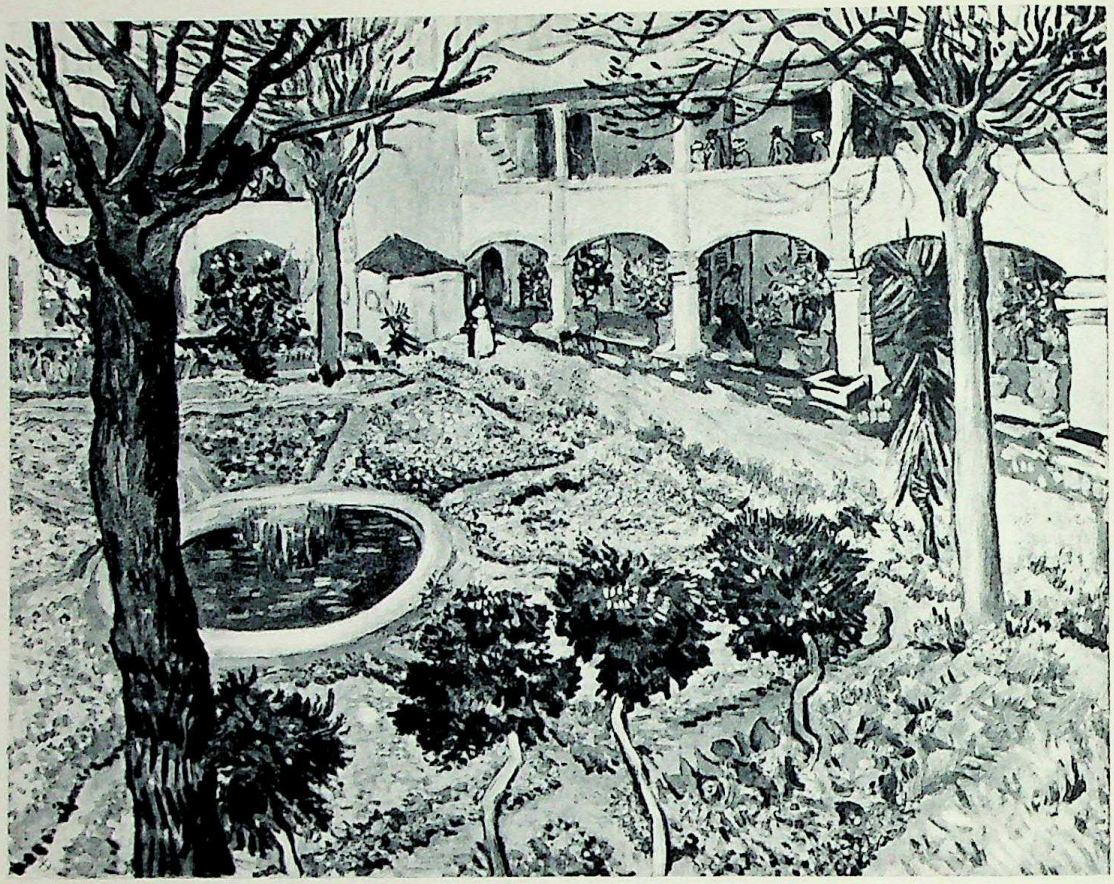
It was obvious that some sort of catastrophe had been blowing up for a long while back, and Dr Rey, who attended Vincent, said as much in his diagnosis. No human frame could stand the wear that Vincent gave his, when he found himself at last in his 'French Japan' and forced himself to paint hundreds of pictures in an effort to express all the visions burning in his mind. Every brush-stroke on the canvas was the climax of a burst of superhuman concentration; every detail had to be thought of in the context of the whole composition and expressed just as he had felt it at the moment of creation. Every picture was a matter of artistic life or death.

Vincent's achievement

And everything had to be right first time, because corrections would put a barrier between the work and the spectator.

Sustaining this test of endurance for many months from morning till night under the blazing southern sun was bound to lead to a mental deterioration. In these nine months in Arles he had done more important work than many another great master in a score of years.

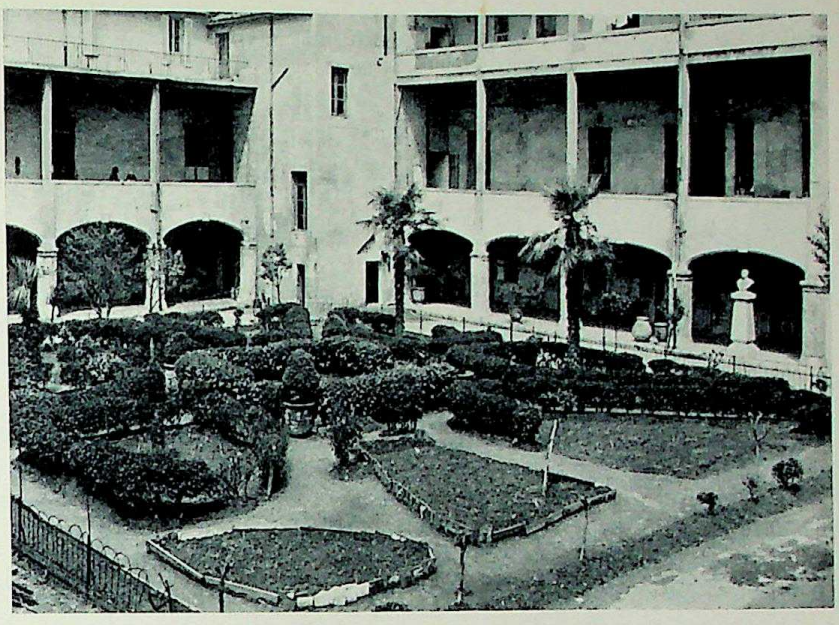
Added to all of these things, he had been drinking too much, his nerves were out of order, his body diseased and the disillusionment about Gauguin was the last straw.



In the hospital cell

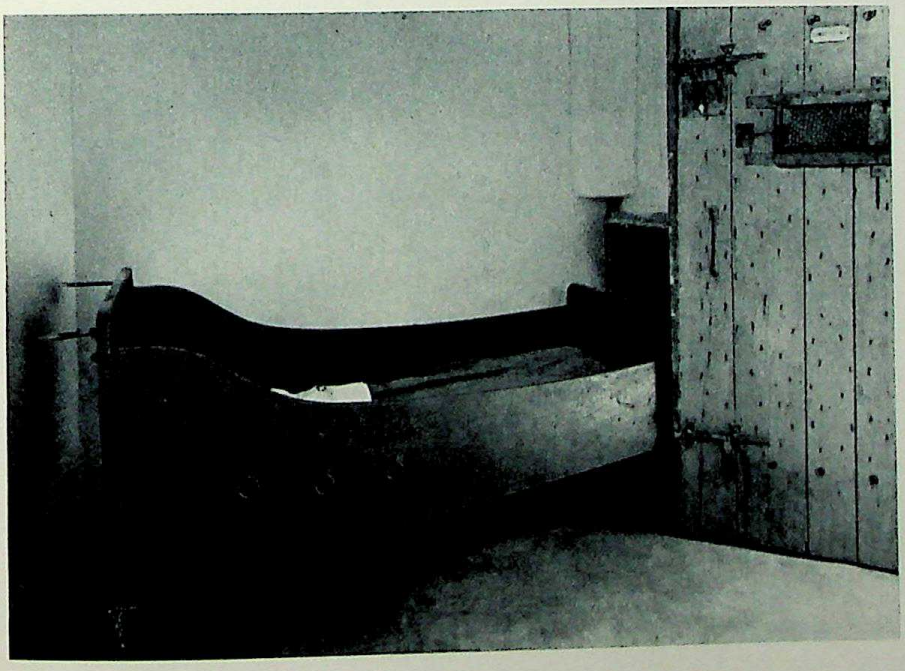
He was confined to a cell for dangerous lunatics in the Arles hospital, whose courtyard he later painted and drew. But a week later, on New Year's Day 1889, he was allowed to write to Theo to set his mind at rest, and on the next day Dr Rey, who was treating him, wrote on the back of a second letter that Vincent was only suffering from a temporary nervous collapse. On 7 January he was discharged and returned to the Yellow House.

He had to wear a bandage round his head until the ear was completely healed and he painted a portrait of himself like this shortly after he left the hospital. The first thing he did after returning to the Yellow House was to write a few words of reassurance to his mother and sister, Wilhelmien, who had been deeply shocked when Theo, on a visit home with his new bride, had been sent for in the emergency. Vincent must have felt quite better by now, for ten days later he painted the portrait of Dr Rey, a triumph which could not have



Photograph of
the hospital garden

◀ *The Garden of the Hospital at Arles*, painted during his second stay in the hospital



Vincent's bedstead
in the Arles Hospital

been achieved by anyone not in full possession of their mental powers. The exact likeness struck everyone who knew the subject.

A few weeks later he finished the fourth version of the *Berceuse*, for which Roulin's wife was the model. It is easy to guess the feeling which made him choose the subject of this picture. He had written to Theo that he hoped that 'when seamen, children and martyrs as they are, see it, they will feel themselves back in their cradle, listening to their nurses singing'. But he, too, was a child, a thousand miles away from his mother, a solitary fisherman, 'exposed, melancholy and alone, to all the dangers of the sad sea', as he had said shortly before to Gauguin.

Vincent was reinstalled in the Yellow House, back at work, and, moreover, painting outstanding pictures; it looked as though the nervous collapse had been only a transitory short term affair, but it was not so. On 9 February he had to go back into hospital again.

Incurable?

Luckily, there was very little public scandal this time. Dr Rey put the relapse down to a fear on Vincent's part that the first outbreak would be repeated and, once this fear was confirmed, Vincent began to feel that he was incurable, that nothing more could be done for him. Again and again he wrote in despair

Portrait with Severed Ear, a self-portrait by van Gogh after he had left hospital, when he was still wearing a large bandage

to Theo, often covering ten pages, and then, besides this constant worry, he was conscious of being a source of ridicule, and even fear, to the people of Arles, who regarded him as an enemy and were sometimes actively hostile. People can be very cruel. The 'normal' people in the town pursued him, set the children on to him. As if that were not enough, they even got up a petition to the mayor to have him shut up again.

Under this double strain, his condition rapidly deteriorated. He could find no peace anywhere, either in himself or in his surroundings, and he finally went as a voluntary patient into a home for neurotics in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, about twenty miles from Arles.

Takes refuge in a home

The Reverend Salles, who had visited Vincent at Christmas in hospital and whom Vincent often mentioned in his letters to Theo, had found him a new lodging in a distant part of the town, but by this time he was morbidly afraid of living alone, particularly now that his friend, Roulin, had moved to Marseille. He needed protection, care, human warmth. He was no longer fit to battle against life on his own.

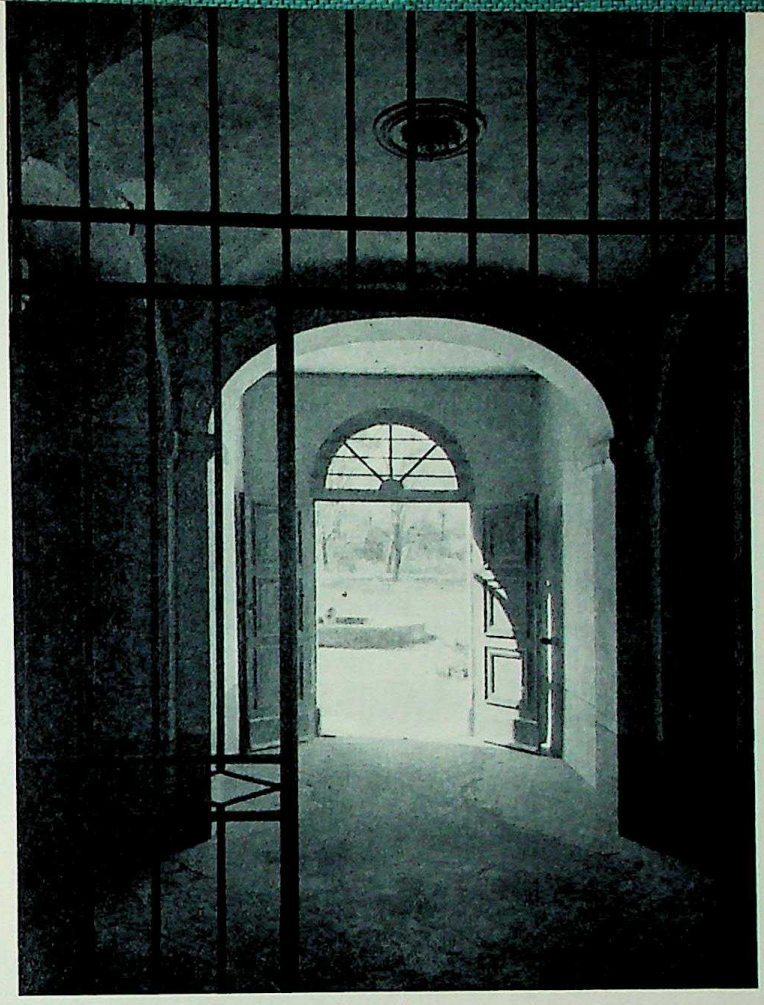
When he arrived at Saint-Rémy, the bolts and bars struck him as a symbol of what his future life would be; they cut him off from the outside world—or, on the other hand, gave him protection from it, and it from him. Calmly, he took up his '*métier de fou*', as he called it, and made up his mind to live and work as though the bolts and bars did not exist. Perhaps he felt that a genius behind bars was still a genius, that the bars could make no difference. One way or another, he enjoyed considerable freedom in the big institution with its rambling buildings, park and gardens. He could move about as he liked and paint to his heart's content. Some of the views of the park which he produced at this time are among the greatest pictures he ever painted.

Genius behind bars

How accurate was Dr Rey in his diagnosis of Vincent's illness? Suspicion is aroused by the fact that the first attack at Christmas was obviously much more severe than Rey's first soothing reports made it out to be. But even today, despite all the progress that has been made in psychiatry, specialists are by no means agreed as to the real nature of Vincent's malady. In 1941 the eminent psychiatrist, Dr G. Kraus of Groningen, published an exhaustive examination entitled *Vincent van Gogh und die Psychiatrie,* including a bibliography alone of over one hundred titles, and in the last seventeen years even more books have been added to the list, even more specialists have puzzled over the problem, even more doctoral theses have been written in support of one view or another.

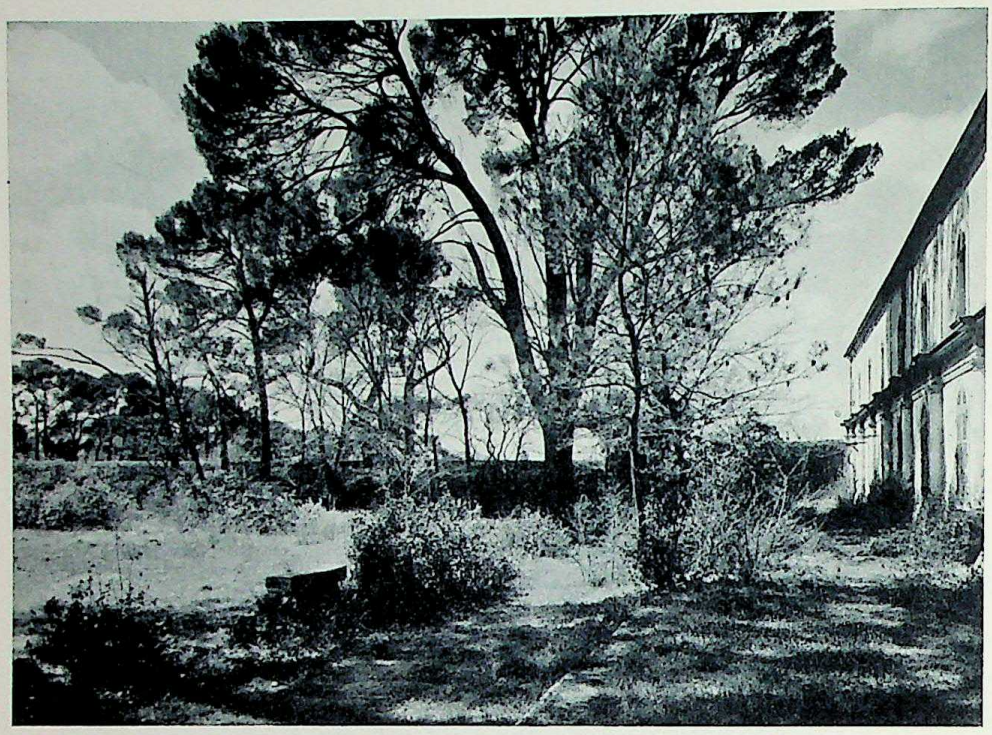
Psychiatrists' diagnoses

Unlike Dr Rey and his followers, who thought the illness a form of epilepsy, Dr Kraus and others inclined to the view that it must have been a kind of schizophrenia.



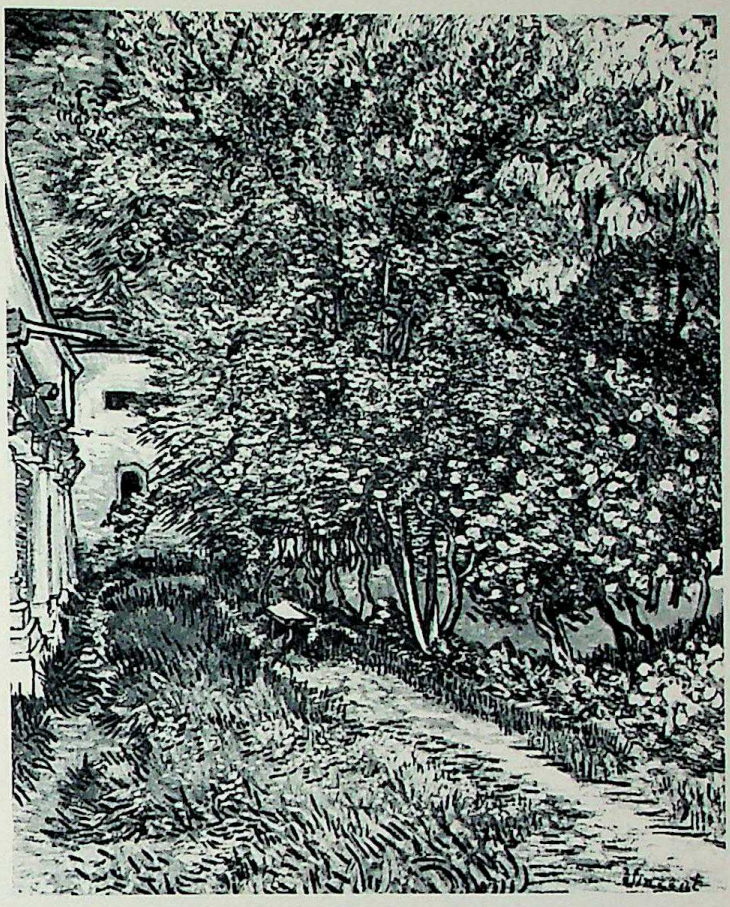
Entrance hall of the Saint Paul Asylum in Saint-Rémy

The Open Door

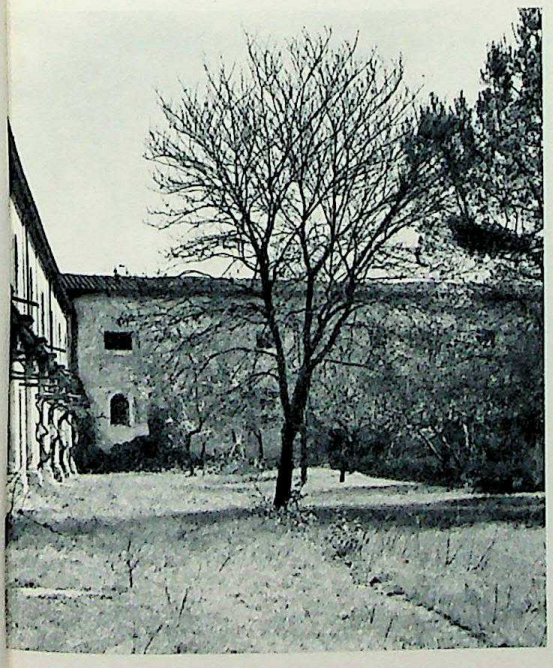


The garden of the lunatic asylum is now completely neglected

Hospital Grounds at Saint-Rémy



The Garden of the Asylum at Saint-Rémy,
painted in the early summer of 1889 . . .



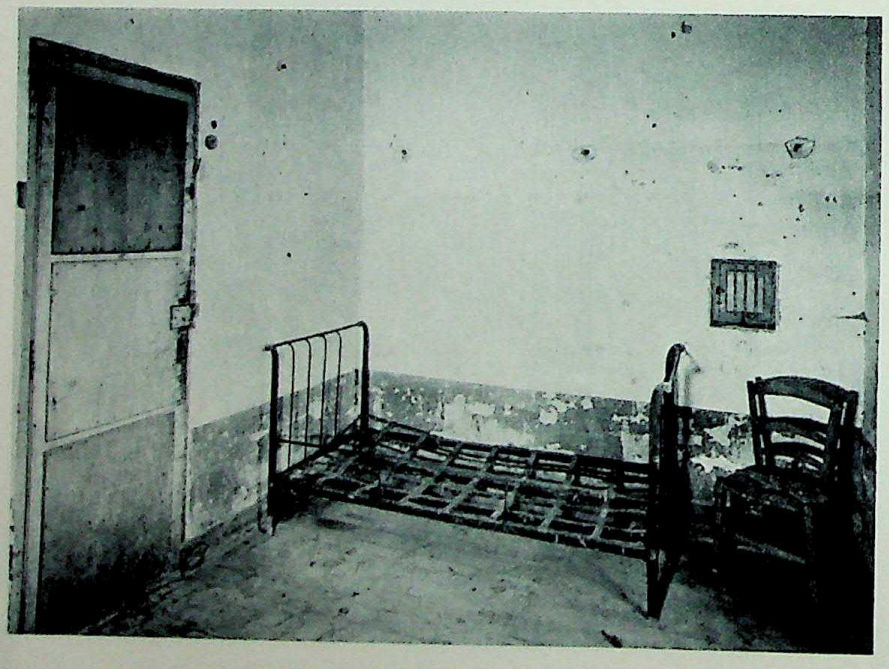
. . . from this spot.

But whatever his illness was, and whether it was curable or not, Vincent bore his eerie surroundings with far more patience than one would have expected of him. He wrote to Theo that his work was going swimmingly—which meant a great deal, coming from such a self-critical man—and that he had made discoveries that he had sought in vain for years; and all this was not said merely to comfort Theo—it is obvious from the pictures he painted at this time.

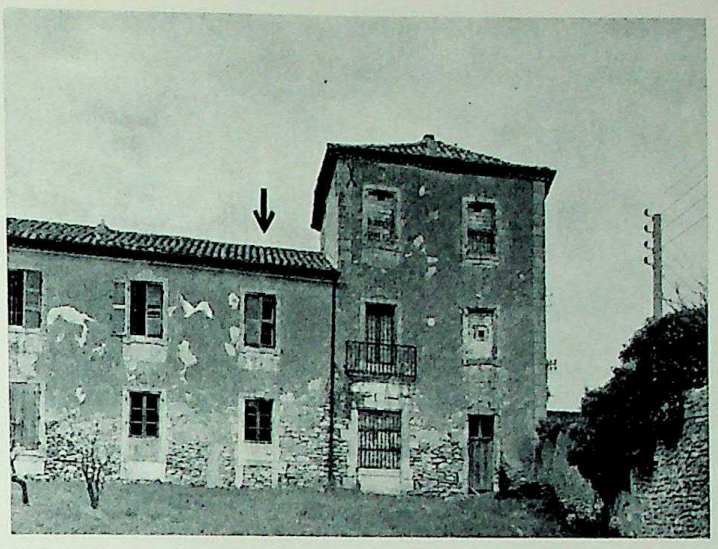
He even managed to paint pictures in his cell which look, at the first glance, as though they must have been painted in the open, in a mountain landscape. It is only when one takes a closer look that it becomes apparent that they must have been painted indoors.

The Saint-Rémy Asylum is not far from a range of mountains which Vincent could see from his first-floor window. This explains why mountains appear so frequently in the paintings of this period, sometimes viewed from one angle, sometimes from another, sometimes on a sunny day, sometimes in the rain. He himself sat indoors so that the paper or canvas did not get wet, and painted what he saw outside—just as Hokusai had painted *The Bridge in the Rain.*

The accuracy of these paintings and drawings is amazing, every detail is in its place. Only a man in full possession of his intellect, at least, could have composed his pictures with such skill, created his artistic cosmos with such ingenuity.



Vincent's cell in Saint-Rémy.



Vincent's cell was in this wing *(see arrow)*

His letters written at this time show the struggle going on in his mind. A picture emerges; he alternated between two extremes, nervous disturbances in which he lost all consciousness and sanity, and astounding clarity of mind. Once each attack was over his painting was as assured as ever.

At Saint-Rémy his daily life was divided between his cell, going for walks under supervision and taking curative baths. For a short while he enjoyed complete freedom and was allowed to go down into the village of Saint-Rémy: there, in the main street lined with plane trees, he painted an autumn picture—*The Roadmenders.*

The New Year 1890 began hopefully. He had never been so at ease in his painting as in the last few pictures. He felt happy and wrote to Theo about it. After the mental strains of the last few months he took courage again. He knew that the attacks would go on recurring periodically, but he put the fact out of his mind. His work improved more and more. 'We can do nothing about it [the illness], so we had better go on working as well as we can, as though nothing were the matter.'

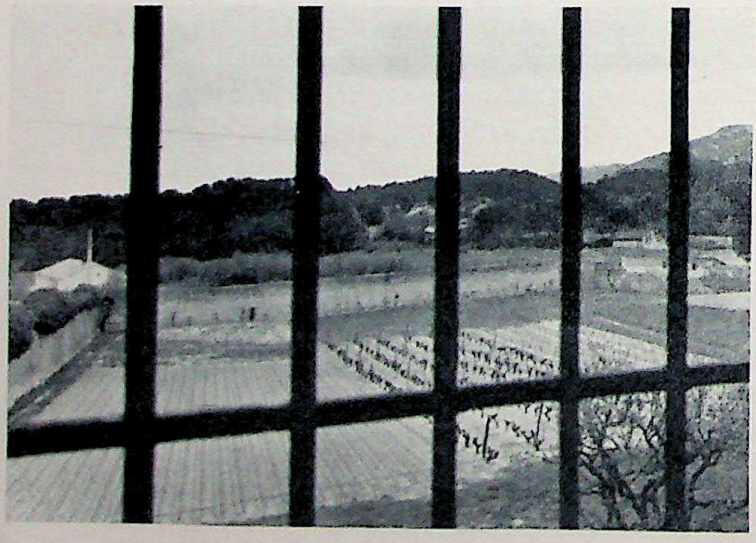
The first newspaper report

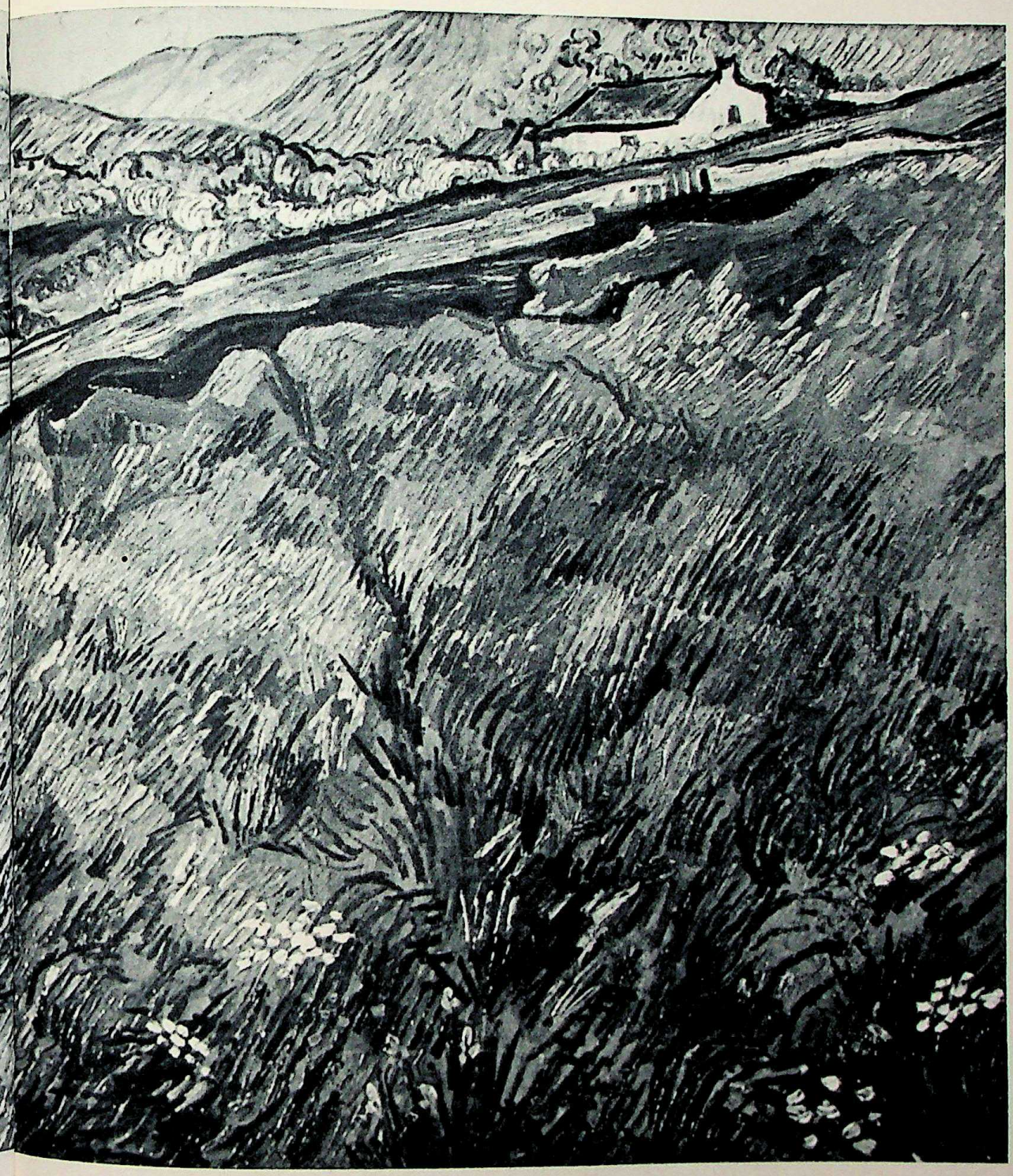
It seemed as though public recognition, which he had long since ceased to hope for, was coming his way at last. In its number of January 1890, the *Mercure de France* had published an article by the young writer and art critic, Albert Aurier, which dealt, sympathetically and with real understanding, with the work of a certain Vincent van Gogh.

Then, on 2 February, he received the glad news that Theo, now married to Johanna Bonger, had become the father of a son. Vincent, childless, but

The Fenced Field,
painted in March–April 1890
through the window of his cell

View through the bars of Vincent's window





always drawn to children, was to be the godfather and the boy would be called after him.

Sells a picture

Two weeks later, more good news. The Luxembourg painter, Anna Boch, had bought his picture *The Red Vines*, for four hundred francs at the exhibition called 'The Twenty', organized by Octave Maus in Brussels. Everything seemed to be going almost excessively well for Vincent, who had become so used to being the exile, the man on the edge of society.

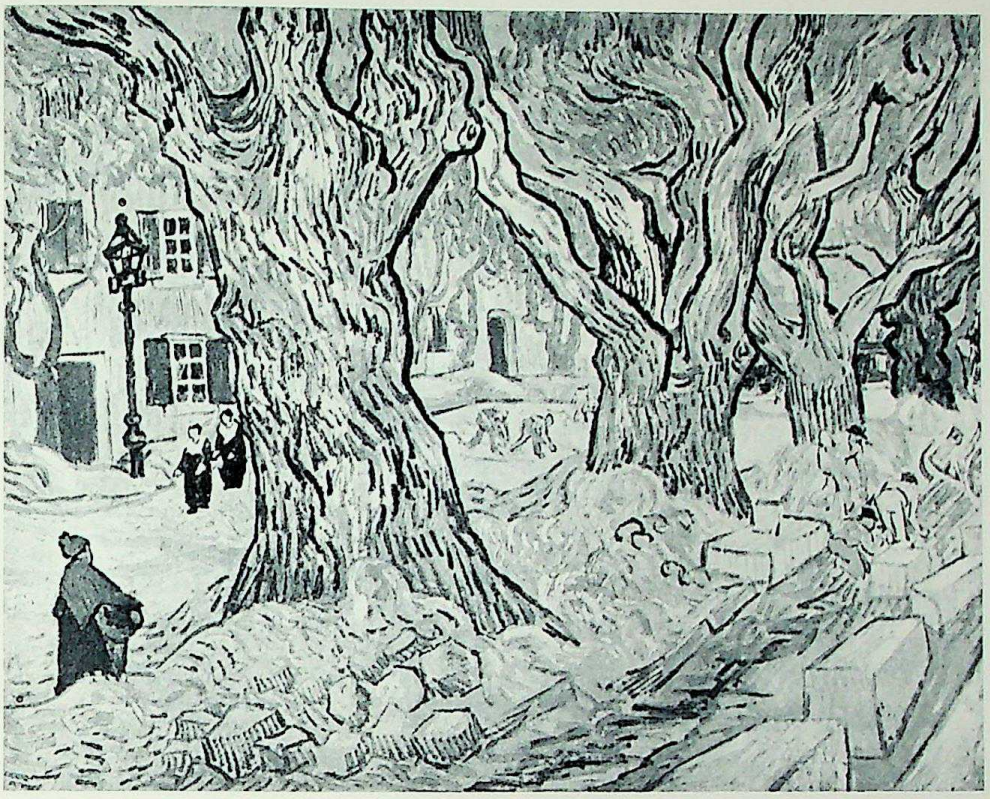
But despite all these excitements, he felt terribly homesick for the North. He told his mother how ardently he wanted to go home. Perhaps it would be possible to return to Antwerp, to work there with Gauguin, whom he went on recommending to Theo's care, and then he could speak Flemish once again and resume his studies of peasants and paint new pictures from them.

During these weeks of homesickness he seriously thought of taking up the theme of *The Potato-Eaters* again; he asked Theo to send him his pen-and-ink sketches. And he thought of repainting the old *Tower of Nuenen* and the Belgian cottages. He went so far as to paint and draw thatched cottages with thick snow on the roofs, standing amid northern coalfields—surrounded as he was by the sunburnt scenery of the South of France, where cottages are never thatched on account of the danger of fire.

Return to the north

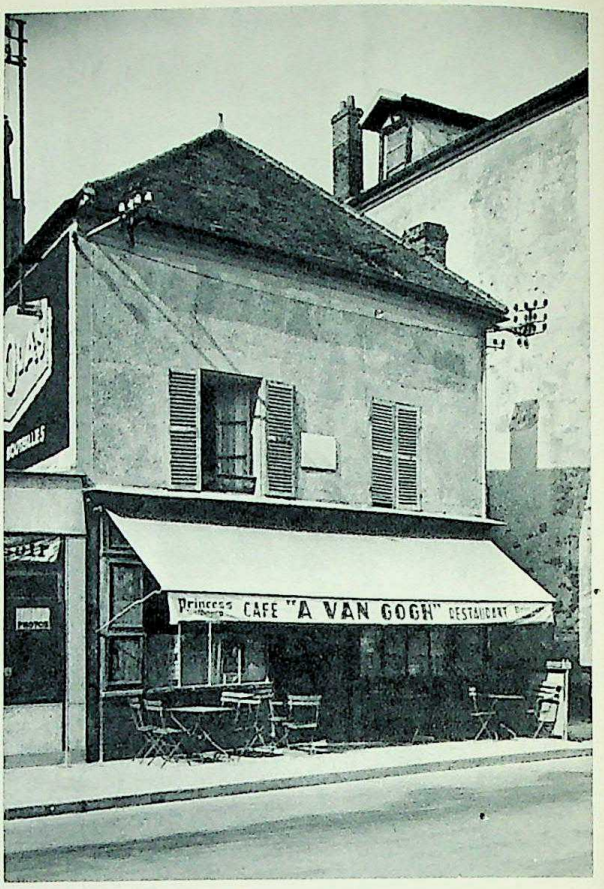
The return to the North was already a reality for him. It would not have been like Vincent to be satisfied with dreams and reveries in painting and writing.

The bathroom in the Saint Paul Asylum



The Roadmenders, painted in November 1889

The boulevard in Saint-Rémy



The house in which Vincent died in Auvers

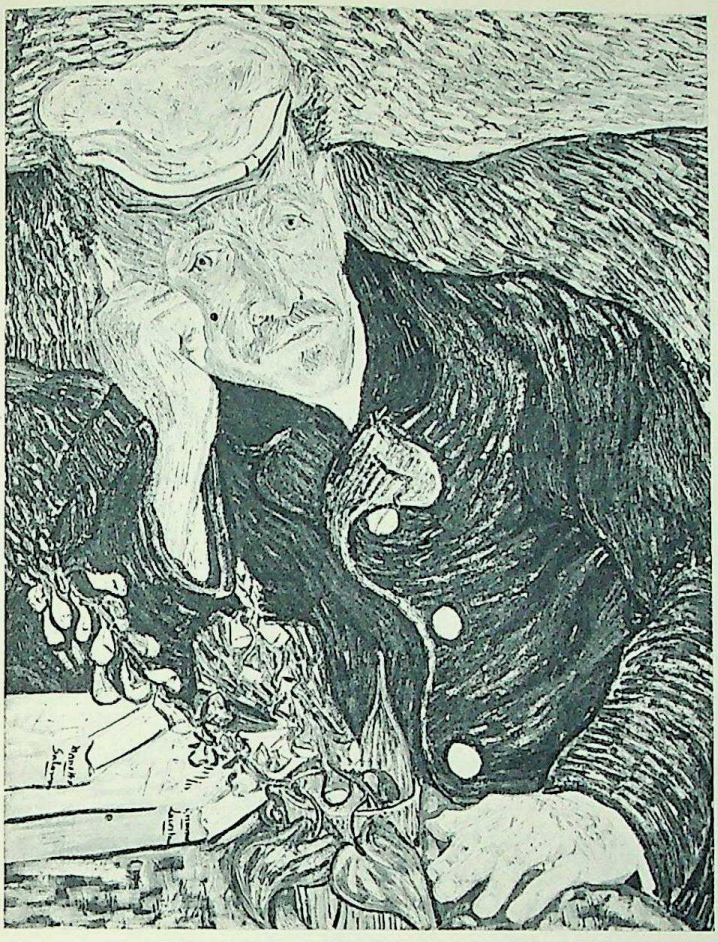
Auvers, a new refuge

In the middle of May he arrived in Paris, where Theo was waiting for him at the Gare de Lyon, but he did not stay long in the capital. His plan was to stay 'only two or three days', as he had written from Saint-Rémy, only long enough to meet and get to know his sister-in-law and his nephew and godson. On 30 May he travelled the twenty-two miles north to Auvers-sur-Oise.

In Auvers lived a doctor, a remarkable man who had a small practice in Paris but devoted much more of his time to his hobbies, drawing, painting and etching. His real name was Paul-Ferdinand Gachet but the art world knew him as Van Rijssel, a pseudonym he adopted from the name of the town in north-west France where he was born. He was not a genius, but he had real gifts, as his paintings, drawings and etchings show.

So it was natural enough that he had friends and acquaintances who were artists. Many of them were already known to the public and were later to become famous far beyond their own country. There were Cézanne, Guillaumin and Pissarro, Sisley, Renoir and Monet, all of them men who later achieved world fame.

Theo's idea was that this doctor and amateur painter should look after Vincent in his spare time, so that Vincent would be freed from the stifling



Dr Gachet,
painted by Vincent . . .

. . . Dr Gachet in a photograph
taken in the early nineties

atmosphere of Saint-Rémy. Theo hoped that his brother would derive a general improvement from being near his family in Paris, in constant contact with an artistic enthusiast, and under the tranquil supervision of a doctor. For, shortly before leaving Saint-Rémy, Vincent had undergone another severe attack.

Vincent took a room over Ravoux's Café-Restaurant opposite the Town Hall, not far from Gachet's house. He took his meals in the restaurant and could reach Gachet's house on the hill in five minutes. Twenty-four hours after his arrival he was writing to Theo that he had arranged with Gachet to paint his portrait.

Portrait of Gachet

Vincent studied his new doctor intently. He told Theo that he found him rather eccentric: 'He is discouraged as a doctor, just as I am discouraged as a painter. He looks as ill and nervous as you and I, and a lot older.' This is the first mention of Theo's illness, which killed him six months later.

It does not take much imagination to conjure up Vincent's frame of mind when he finally left the Saint-Rémy Asylum. With the 'cannibals' of Arles, as he called the people who had demanded his return to hospital, constantly on

his heels, he had felt like a hunted animal, too terrified to know where to turn for refuge. In that situation it cost him few pangs to exchange liberty for security, or even to accept complete voluntary captivity. Besides, he was soon allowed to go out, under supervision, and to paint the neighbourhood; but the fact remained that he was not free and could not really feel free.

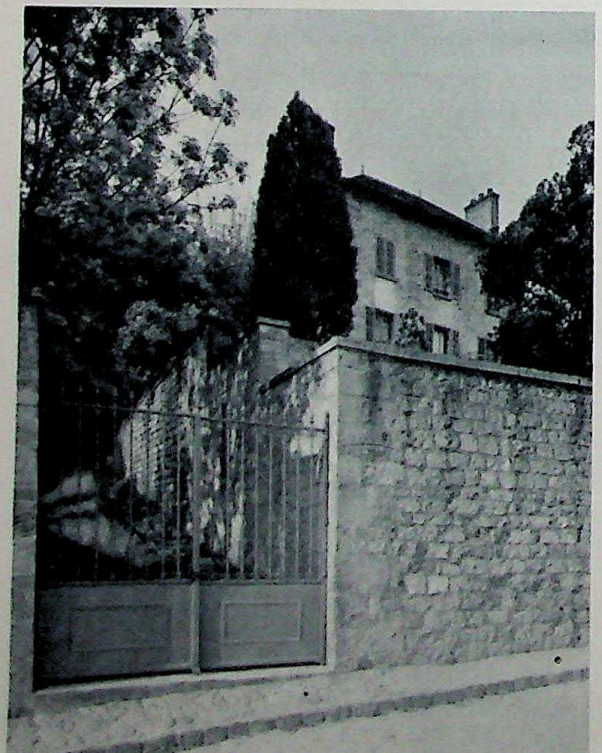
Protest

It was because of the constant supervision, or perhaps merely the feeling of confirnement, that one day he kicked the warder, an exceptionally pleasant and good-natured man, in the behind. He could not help himself; the urge was irresistible and he immediately apologized to the warder. But it was the same urge which had made him want to attack the policeman who had robbed him of his freedom—a powerless protest against those who sought to confine him, and in the end he had accepted confinement voluntarily.

It was quite simple: the more the spectre of danger faded away, the more his suppressed longing for freedom increased, and when the door of the erstwhile Saint Paul's Monastery in Saint-Rémy shut after him, he left his inferiority complex behind him.

A new self-confidence grew and strengthened within him the more he breathed in the air of freedom, so long as there were no new complications. The very fact that he had made the journeys from Saint-Rémy to Paris and from Paris to Auvers without accident confirmed and encouraged him.

How otherwise could he have dared to ask Dr Gachet, immediately on arrival, to let him paint his portrait? In the meanwhile, until he could begin, he wandered through the countryside, so different from that of the Alpilles



Dr Gachet's house at Auvers-sur-Oise

Mademoiselle Gachet at the piano

Town Hall, Zundert

Town Hall, Auvers-sur-Oise

round Saint-Rémy. Before a month was out he had finished not only the full-face portrait of Dr Gachet, but a large number of landscapes and a picture of Gachet's daughter, Marguérite, at the piano.

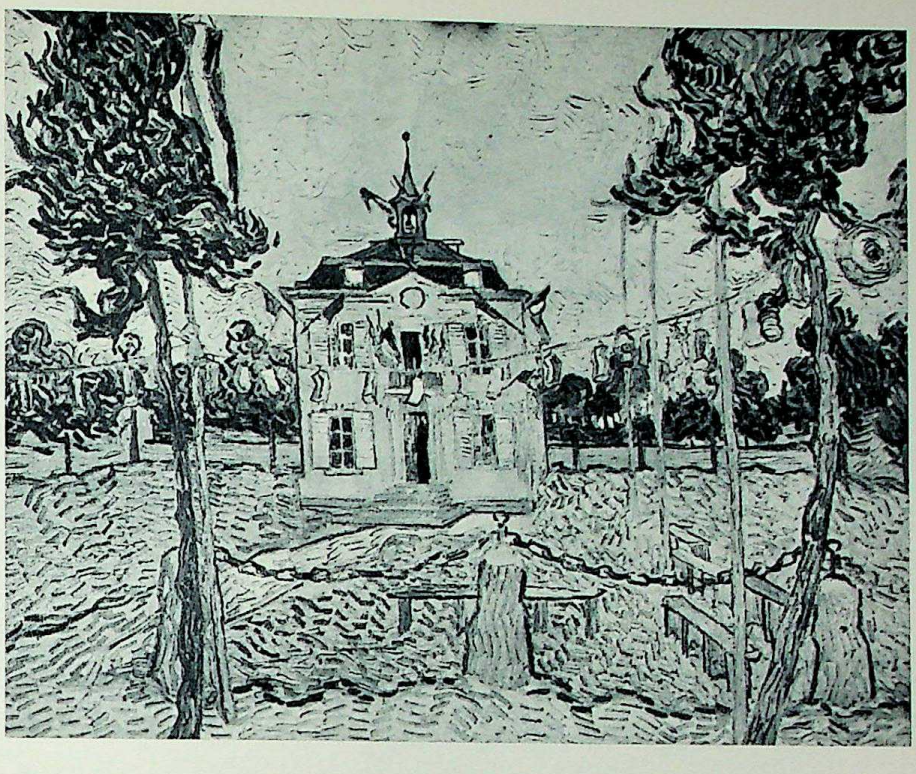
This was his last portrait and its similarity in technique to the earlier ones, those of Milliet (Arles), of the women from the dock area, of the man with the Victor Hugo head (Antwerp), is amazing: there is the same brushwork with the same powerful broad strokes. Only the colours are different. Vincent's artistic identity always remained the same.

In the last few months he had developed a feature which he had not used much before—short, nervous arcs joining together to form a continuous movement. The Saint-Rémy pictures show this new wave movement, full of vital power, for the first time.

Unlike the Impressionists, who reproduced only the outward appearances of things, he felt and showed in his work the moving life-origins of the cosmos; one has only to look at his cypress trees, reaching up like flames into the sky, to see this.

Cosmic painting

In Paris he had read the poems of Walt Whitman; he mentioned them casually in a letter to Wilhelmien. His first attempts to translate the American's 'lyrical flight into the universal' into pictures were his night skies with stars. But the vision was still immobile; the stars flickered against a peaceful, deep blue cloud-mass. In Saint-Rémy he painted the same thing again, and his stars, clouds and horizons began to swirl round. The stars were sucked down into



The Town Hall at Auvers on Bastille Day, painted on 14 July 1890

an inescapable whirlpool. By the time he reached Auvers-sur-Oise, sky and stars had all disappeared; there was left only a great stream of air driving through everything and absorbing everything into its vortex. It was as though he saw through the deceptively material exterior of everything round him to the delicate balance of things caught in the huge upheaval of creation.

Vincent made a quick recovery. Physically he impressed Theo and his wife and Dr Gachet and his family. Johanna even thought he looked healthier than Theo.

A large part of his wellbeing was, no doubt, due to the fact that he was only an hour's journey from Theo. The brothers could meet as often as they liked and took frequent advantage of this. One Sunday in June they all, Theo, Johanna and the two Vincents, visited Dr Gachet and the time passed merrily.

Last visit to Paris

Shortly afterwards, at the beginning of July, Vincent went to Paris and entertained the writer, Albert Aurier, in Theo's house in the Cité Pigalle. (Some time before he had written in all modesty to Aurier and told him that his part in the solution of the colour problem had been very small and that the credit was due mostly to Gauguin and Monticelli.) Later Toulouse-Lautrec came for a meal and they joked about his being invited to a funeral as he entered the building. Guillaumin was to be another guest, but before he arrived Vincent suddenly decided to leave. Perhaps he suspected that he was going

Johanna van Gogh-Bonger and Vincent's goddchild

Theo van Gogh

to have another attack. Perhaps work was calling him. Perhaps the noise and conviviality was too much for him after so many months of solitude. Perhaps there was some other reason that nobody knew but himself.

On his return to Auvers he began painting and drawing with redoubled vigour. He was seen working in the Jardin de Daubigny, less than two hundred yards from Ravoux's, and in the cornfield behind the little graveyard.

Suicide

And then, one evening—Sunday, July 27—he was brought home severely wounded. One and a half days later, on the morning of the 29th, he died in Theo's arms. Theo had been thunder-struck at the terrible news of Vincent's suicide attempt. What had happened? The only clues are in the death certificate, a report in a local paper and the verbal and written accounts given by Dr Gachet, Theo van Gogh, Johanna, Emile Bernard and a few unknown witnesses.

One thing is certain: Vincent deliberately tried to kill himself. All the evidence is agreed upon this, as upon the fact that he used a gun, but nobody is sure where the bullet entered his body; some say in the stomach, others in the chest.

Letter from Vincent to Albert Aurier about the latter's newspaper appraisal of him ▶

N° 32. — 70e ANNÉE. LE NUMÉRO : 15 CENTIMES JEUDI 7 AOUT 1890.

L'ÉCHO PONTOISIEN

Journal de l'arrondissement de Pontoise

PARAISSANT LE JEUDI

AGRICULTURE. — INDUSTRIE. — COMMERCE. — LITTÉRATURE. — NOUVELLES LOCALES ET FAITS DIVERS

Annonces judiciaires, commerciales et industrielles

— **AUVERS-SUR-OISE.** — Dimanche 27 juillet, un nommé Van Gogh, âgé de 37 ans, sujet hollandais, artiste peintre, de passage à Auvers, s'est tiré un coup de revolver dans les champs et, n'étant que blessé, il est rentré à sa chambre où il est mort le surlendemain.

Report of Vincent's death in *L'Echo Pontoisien*

Both can cause death. The question would be unimportant if it were not for Vincent's enthusiasm for Japan. Did he aim at his stomach, in imitation of Japanese *hara-kiri*?

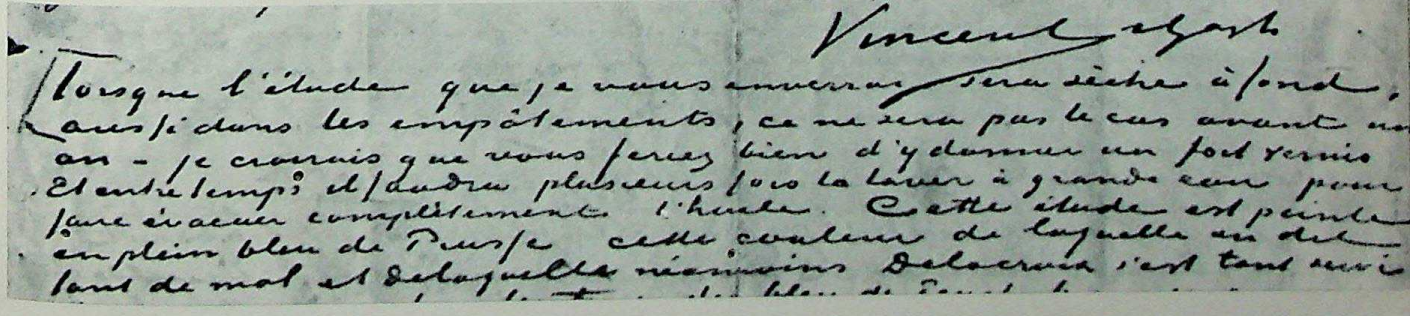
Another unsolved problem is where he made the attempt. 'In the fields', people said, and left it at that. The report in *L'Echo Pontoisien* gave the same account, but in Auvers it was rumoured that 'the fields' meant the Commency, the fields near the graveyard. As to whether this is true or not, the death certificate gives no clue because it does not mention the circumstances of the death. In any case, there was another version of the story, which seems not improbable. One of Auvers' oldest and most respectable citizens said, shortly after the shooting occurred, that he had seen Vincent walking away from the Ravoux hotel in the direction of Chaponval, or, in other words, in the opposite direction from the Commency, and that he had made the suicide attempt behind a manure heap in the yard of a little farmhouse in the Rue Boucher.

'In the fields'

This farmhouse was much nearer Ravoux's hotel than the fields behind the graveyard. Taking into account how little blood he had lost while being carried home, considering the nature of his wound, this story seems the likeliest.

But the most important, the central, question remains unanswerable. *Why* did Vincent attempt to kill himself? The first possible answer is his endless

Motives for suicide

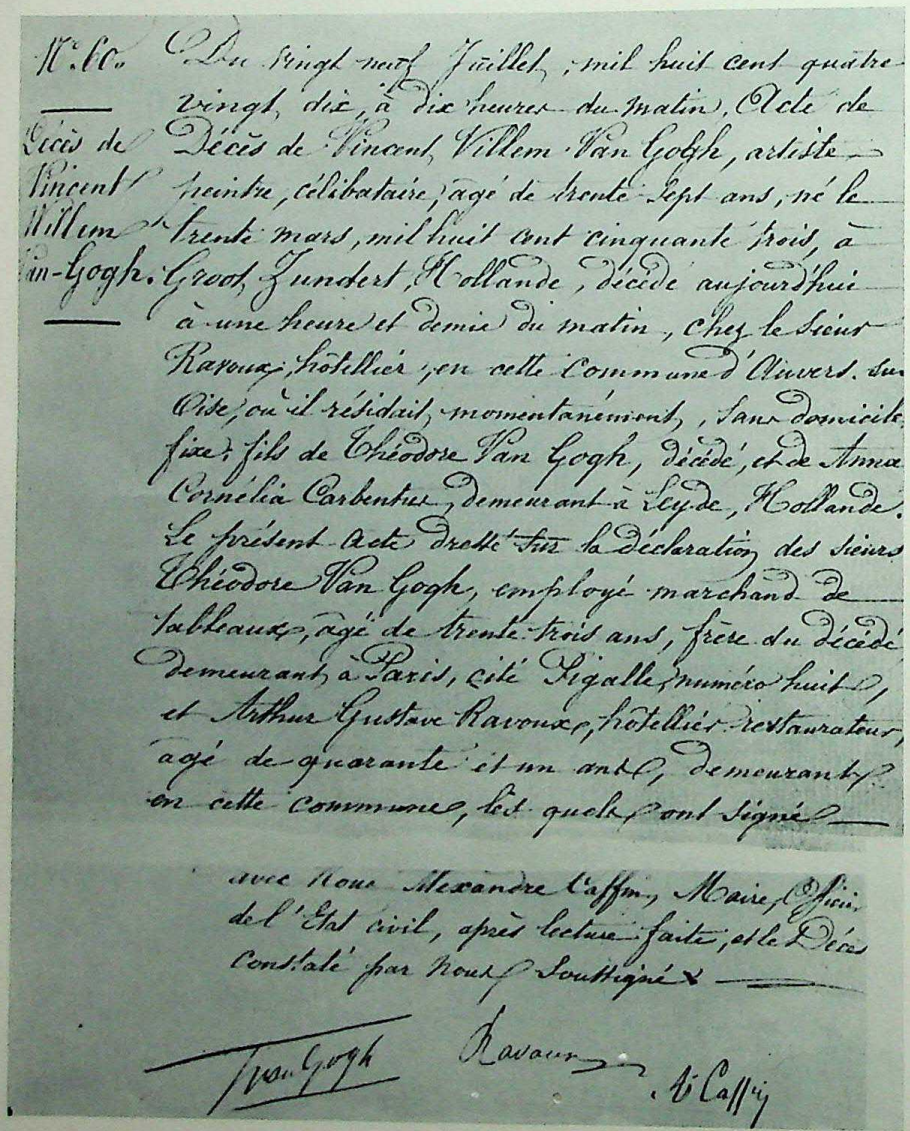


financial dependence on Theo. Aware of his physical and mental condition, Vincent had given up all hope of ever being able to stand on his own feet and provide for himself. Perhaps he could no longer bear to be a drain on his brother's pocket, particularly since Theo was now responsible for a wife and child as well.

Marguérite Gachet

Or perhaps he had fallen in love with Gachet's daughter, Marguérite, and the doctor strictly forbade any close association, so that Vincent's last hope of founding a family, like Theo, disappeared, and he ceased to see any point in living.

A third explanation is that Vincent's work in Auvers-sur-Oise was only a last guttering of the candle before it was finally extinguished, and that Vincent



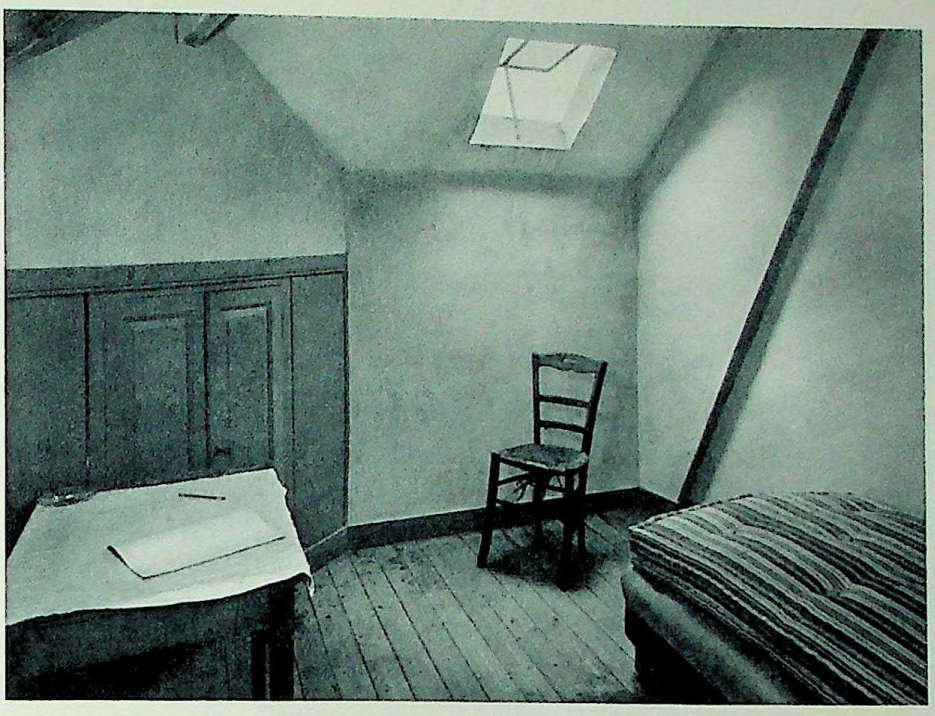
N° 60.

Décès de Vincent Willem Van-Gogh.

Du vingt neuf Juillet, mil huit cent quatre vingt, dix, à dix heures du matin, Acte de Décès de Vincent Villem Van Gogh, artiste peintre, célibataire, âgé de trente sept ans, né le trente mars, mil huit cent cinquante trois, à Groot Zundert, Hollande, décédé aujourd'hui à une heure et demie du matin, chez le Sieur Ravoux, hôtellier, en cette Commune d'Auvers-sur-Oise, où il résidait, momentanément, sans domicile fixe; fils de Théodore Van Gogh, décédé, et de Anna Cornélia Carbentus, demeurant à Leyde, Hollande. Le présent Acte dressé sur la déclaration des sieurs Théodore Van Gogh, employé marchand de tableaux, âgé de trente trois ans, frère du décédé demeurant à Paris, cité Pigalle, numéro huit, et Arthur Gustave Ravoux, hôtellier restaurateur, âgé de quarante et un ans, demeurant en cette commune, lesquels ont signé avec Nous Alexandre Caffin, Maire, Officier de l'Etat civil, après lecture faite, et le Décès constaté par Nous soussigné.

Van Gogh Ravoux A. Caffin

Vincent van Gogh's death certificate.



Room in which Vincent died

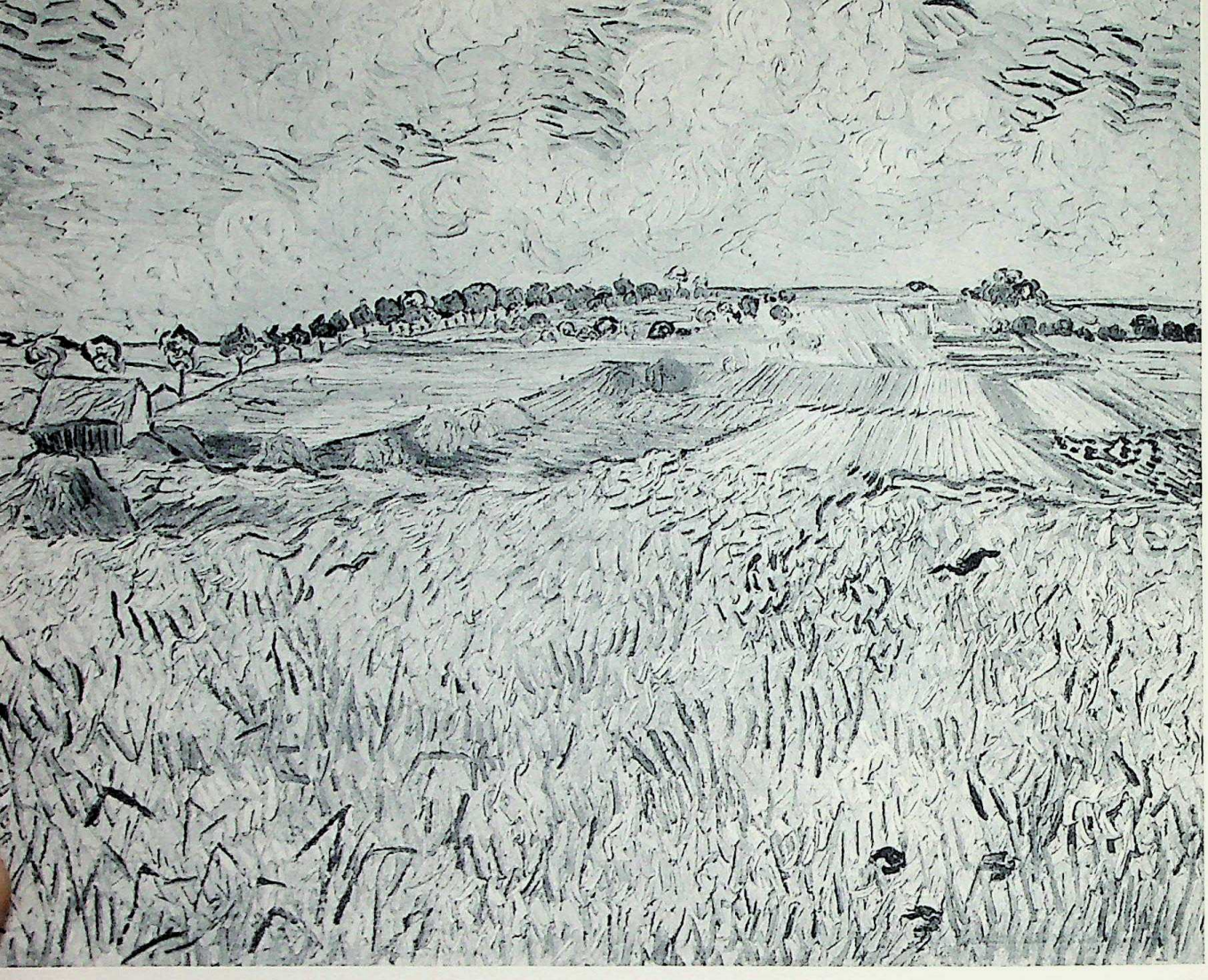
knew this and preferred to give up rather than to see his standards deteriorate. In other words, that he deliberately ended his life in the knowledge that his powers were exhausted. Or perhaps it was only the fear of a new attack and further suffering which made him choose death.

As soon as he was in his grave, a new phase of his history began. His friends, who had hurried to the spot from Paris and elsewhere, hung the walls of his room with his pictures—dumb witnesses to his love of the beautiful and his sufferings in the artist's struggle with intractable reality.

Funeral

Behind the coffin walked Theo, Charles Laval, André Bonger, Lucien Pissarro, Emile Bernard, Lauzet, Tanguy, Ravoux, Dr Gachet, several other artists and men and women from Auvers and the surrounding area, and then Vincent's corpse was laid in the earth, as custom prescribes. The whole of his life, from his birth onwards, he had been different, outside the run of normality. Only now, at the very end, he was admitted into the traditional, the normality which had been denied to him when alive. But it was only for a short while, for his death was soon followed by his rise to fame, and that again, like his life, was something unique, abnormal.

Theo had always believed that his brother was a genius, always been sure that sooner or later fame would come to him. Again and again he had tried to



The Plain near Auvers

explain to his mother and father, sisters and brother, that Vincent was 'different', that he was destined to achieve something extraordinary, and to people who were not members of the family, who were artists themselves, he said even more.

One evening, long before Vincent's death, when Theo was walking through the streets of Paris with the Dutch painter, Isaac Israel, they happened to speak of Vincent' work. Theo said: 'I should not be surprised if my brother were one of the great geniuses, a man to be compared with Beethoven.'

Theo himself lived only six months after Vincent's death. He lies by the side of his beloved brother in the country graveyard in Auvers-sur-Oise, among the great golden cornfields, which formed the subject of Vincent van Gogh's last hymns of creation.

The graves of the two van Gogh brothers, Vincent and Théodore

1853 30 March: Birth of Vincent-Willem van Gogh in Zundert. (Father: The Reverend Theodorus van Gogh.)

1857 1 May: Birth of Theo, Vincent's brother, in Zundert.

1861 1 January: Vincent went to the village school.

1864–8 Vincent attended schools in Zevenbergen and Tilburg.

1869 30 July: Vincent became an apprentice in the firm of art dealers, Goupil & Co., The Hague.

1873 1 January: Theo began work as an employee in the Brussels branch of Goupil & Co.

1873–5 Vincent was transferred to the London branch of the firm. Unhappy love-affair with Ursula Loyer. Differences with the firm.

1876 1 January: Goupil & Co. dismissed Vincent. 17 April: Vincent became an assistant teacher in Ramsgate. I July: Vincent joined Mr Jones, a Methodist minister of Isleworth, as lay preacher.

1877 Returned home to Etten. Preparation for matriculation.

1878 July: Vincent became an evangelical preacher. 26 December: he went to the Borinage, a mining area.

1880 Vincent discovered his true calling. Became friendly with van Rappard.

1881 During the summer he fell in love with his cousin, Kee Vos. Rejected by her.

1882 January: Went to The Hague and took painting lessons from Anton Mauve. First oil-paintings. Began living with Sien and her children. Friendly with Mauve, Breitner and Weissenbruch.

1883 September: Vincent parted from Sien and moved to Drente.

1884 August: Margo Begeman from Nuenen, whom Vincent wanted to marry, took poison on account of her family's opposition to the match. Began to teach Kerssemakers and three other pupils painting.

1885 Vincent's father died as a result of a stroke. Work on *The Potato-Eaters*. 28 November: moved to Antwerp, studied Rubens, became a pupil at the Academy.

1886 March: Vincent went to Theo in Paris. Worked at the Cormon Studio where he met Toulouse-Lautrec and Emile Bernard. June: Theo and Vincent moved to 54 rue Lepic.

1887 Met Signac, Seurat, Pissarro, Gauguin and Guillaumin. Became acquainted with Japanese colour-prints at Bing's and Père Tanguy's.

1888 21 February: Vincent moved to Arles. March–April: painted *Souvenir de Mauve, Le Pont de Langlois,* and several pictures of trees in blossom. May: moved to the Yellow House in the Place Lamartine. June: painted and drew in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. 20 October: Paul Gauguin joined him in Arles. December: Vincent and Gauguin visited the museum in Montpellier together. 23 December: quarrel between Vincent and Gauguin. Vincent cut off his left ear-lobe. First nervous attack. Hospital.

1889 7 January: Vincent was allowed to leave hospital and return to the Yellow House. Self-portrait in a fur cap. Portrait of Dr Rey, his doctor. 9 February: returned to hospital as consequence of a petition signed by numerous Arles citizens. 3 May: Vincent entered the Saint-Paul Asylum in Saint-Rémy, near Arles, as a voluntary patient.

1890 January: First article on Vincent van Gogh, contributed by Aurier to the *Mercure de France.* First sale of one of his pictures, *The Red Vines,* bought by Anna Boch in Brussels for four hundred francs. Spring: Vincent felt an urge to return to the North. On 16 May he arrived in Paris where Theo took him in. 20 May: took up residence in Auvers-sur-Oise, in Ravoux's boarding-house, under the medical care of Dr Gachet, whom he painted and from whom he learned etching. June: painted Mademoiselle Gachet at the piano. July: visited Paris, saw Aurier and Toulouse-Lautrec. Suddenly left the party and returned to Auvers. 29 July: attempted suicide by shooting himself with a gun. Died two days later in Ravoux's boarding-house.

1891 25 January: Theo died.

An asterisk indicates a colour plate

* *Frontispiece.* During his period at Arles, Vincent van Gogh painted a self-portrait which he dedicated to his friend, Paul Gauguin (top left, in French: *à mon ami, Paul G.)*

6 THE ENTRY IN THE BAPTISMAL REGISTER of the Netherlands Reformed Church in Zundert, recording Vincent van Gogh's baptism on 24 April 1853. *Archives of the Reformed Community of Zundert, Baptismal Register, Th. van Sprang Collection, Zundert.*

THE HOUSE WHERE VINCENT WAS BORN. Vincent is said to have been born in the room from which a flag is hanging. This photograph was taken on 9 May 1902. The house is no longer standing.

7 VINCENT'S BROTHER'S GRAVE. The inscription on the tombstone reads: *'Vincent van Gogh 1852, Suffer little children to come unto me: for of such is the Kingdom of God. Luke 18, v. 16'.*

DEATH CERTIFICATE showing his brother's death on 30 March 1852. In the margin: No. 29, Gogh van–stillborn.

BIRTH CERTIFICATE. In the margin: 'No. 29, Gogh van, Vincent-Willem. In the year one thousand eight hundred and thirty five, on the thirty-first day of the month of March, published before our Registrar of Births of the community of Zundert and Wernhout the Reverend Theodorus van Gogh, thirty-one years old, minister of the Reformed Church, domiciled in Zundert, who informed us that on the thirtieth of March of this year at eleven o'clock in the morning, was born within this parish, district A, number twenty-nine, to him, the father, and to his wife, Anna Cornelia Carbentus, domiciled privatim in Zundert, a child of the male sex, which has been given the name Vincent-Willem.' *Parish Archives, Zundert.*

8 THE PICTURESQUE CHURCH of Zundert, where both Vincent and Theo were baptized, was built in 1806.

9 PLACES WHERE VINCENT LIVED: 1853–64, Zundert; 1864–6, Zevenbergen; 1866–8, Tilburg; 1869–73, The Hague I; 1873–4, London I; 1874, Paris I; 1874–5, London II; 1875–6, Paris II; 1876, Etten I; 1876, Ramsgate; 1876, Isleworth; 1877, Etten II; 1877, Dordrecht; 1877–8, Amsterdam; 1878, Etten III; 1878, Brussels I; 1878–80, Borinage; 1880–1, Brussels II; 1881, Etten IV; 1881–3, The Hague II; 1883, Drente; 1883–5, Nuenen; 1885–6, Antwerp; 1886–8, Paris III; 1888–9, Arles; 1889–90, Saint-Rémy; 1890, Auvers-sur-Oise.

10 *Farm and Waggon-Shed.* On the back of this drawing, in pencil on hand-made paper, $7^{7}/_{8}'' \times 10^{5}/_{8}''$, Theodorus van Gogh wrote: '8 February 1864, Vincent'. This was the date of Vincent's father's forty-second birthday and his son, then eleven years old, gave him the drawing

as a birthday present. It is the only drawing from Vincent's childhood which is dated. *Ds. em. J. P. Scholte-van Houten Collection, Lochem.*

11 THE ONLY SURVIVING PHOTOGRAPH of Vincent van Gogh. Another photograph (see page 14) which was published in the first edition (1914) of Vincent's letters to his brother Theo, has disappeared.

12 ANNA CORNELIA CARBENTUS, Vincent's mother, who married Theodorus van Gogh in May 1851, was born on 10 September 1819, and died in 1907. *Ds. em. J. P. Scholte-van Houten Collection, Lochem.*

VINCENT'S MOTHER drew this flower study ($4\frac{7}{8}'' \times 3\frac{1}{8}''$), signed below right 'A. C. Carbentus, 5 March 1844', at twenty-five, seven years before her marriage to Theodorus van Gogh. She had both literary and artistic gifts. The flowers are violets, forget-me-nots, vetches and lilies-of-the-valley. *Ds. em. J. P. Scholte-van Houten Collection, Lochem.*

13 *Vincent's Mother;* black chalk, heightened with white. Etten, June-July 1881. *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.* Later, in Arles, Vincent did another portrait of his mother, this time in oil.

The Reverend Theodorus van Gogh. Pencil and Indian ink wash heightened with white, Etten, June-July 1881, $13'' \times 9\frac{7}{8}''$. *G. J. Nieuwenhuigen Segaar Collection, The Hague.*

ELIZABETH-HUBERTA VAN GOGH was one of Vincent's sisters. She was born on 16 May 1859, and was six years younger than Vincent. In 1910 she published *Vincent van Gogh, Personal Memories of an Artist. Ds. em. J. P. Scholte-van Houten Collection, Lochem.*

14 THE PREMISES OF GOUPIL & Co., art dealers, founded by one of Vincent's uncles, were at No. 10 Plaats in The Hague. This was where Vincent began work as an employee, after leaving school. *Mrs Tersteeg Collection, The Hague.*

VINCENT AT EIGHTEEN. The original photograph is no longer in existence. It was published by Frau Johanna van Gogh-Bonger, Theo's widow, in the first edition of Vincent's letters.

INTERIOR OF GOUPIL & Co. It was in this *salon* that Vincent became acquainted with the world of painting, drawing and etching. At this time, too, he began his long correspondence with his brother, Theo. *Mrs Tersteeg Collection, The Hague.*

15 THIS DRAWING probably dates from the time when Vincent was working in The Hague branch of Goupil & Co. It is an iconographic representation of the so-called Hofvijver in the Dutch capital.

16 THE FRONT AT RAMSGATE. A comparison between this photograph and the sketch shows clearly his talent for simplification and unification.

17 *View of the Front, Ramsgate.* Vincent wrote to Theo on 31 May 1876: 'I enclose a small drawing of the view from the schoolroom window, through which the boys gaze after their parents when the latter's visits are over and they are returning to the station.' *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

18 MR STOKES' SCHOOL IN RAMSGATE. After being dismissed from Goupil & Co., Vincent soon found, through an advertisement, a post as teacher in a school belonging to a Mr Stokes of Ramsgate.

This establishment was at 6 Royal Road, the second house from the corner. He drew his sketches of the front through the first-floor window.

19 Anna van Gogh was Frau Scholte-van Houten's mother. *Ds. em. J. P. Scholte-van Houten Collection, Lochem.*

Welwyn. Left, Ivy Cottage. Right, the Church.

21 The church in Isleworth. It was in this church, by the Thames, about a hundred yards from Mr Jones' house that Vincent preached his first sermon.

Isleworth. This was the house in which Mr Jones lived and kept his school. Vincent also lived here while he was assisting Jones as teacher and lay preacher.

22/3 Writing to Theo, Vincent said of the Borinage: 'Round the pit there are poor miners' houses, a few dead trees, blackened by the smoke, thorn-bushes, dung-heaps and rubbish-heaps.' And: 'The villages here have a deserted, silent, dead quality, for life is lived below instead of above ground.'

24 'Le Salon du Bébé'. In one of his letters to Theo, Vincent wrote: 'I have already spoken here on several occasions, sometimes in a fairly large room, specially arranged for religious meetings....' And: '... The place where I spoke is only a large, plain room, which could accommodate a hundred people at a pinch.' The room in his description was popularly called 'Le Salon du Bébé'.

25 The title which van Gogh gave this drawing, *Women Miners Carrying Sacks*, indicates its connexion with another sketch of the same name made in April 1881. Van Gogh himself described this as a rough sketch for another study of the subject. Pen, pencil and Indian ink wash ($16^{7}/_{8}'' \times 23^{5}/_{8}''$). *Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum, Otterlo.*

26 Charles Decrucq's house. After he had been living for a while with Jean-Baptiste Denis in Kost, Vincent moved to Decrucq's house in August 1879. In a letter dated 20 August 1880, he gave as his address: 'Vincent, c/o Charles Decrucq, Rue du Pavillon 3, Cuesmes'. He also added: 'on the marsh'—'au marais'—not a mere picturesque description, but literal fact; the house was sunk so deep into the marsh that it only remained upright by the aid of several stout supports.

27 *Au Charbonnage*. In a letter to Theo from Laeken, near Brussels, Vincent wrote: 'The small drawing *Au Charbonnage* is really nothing remarkable. This cottage... is a small tenement to which the workers come at breakfast-time to eat their bread and drink a glass of beer.' *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

29 The Reverend Theodorus van Gogh, Vincent's father was born on 8 February 1822 and died on 26 March 1885. On 1 April 1849 he was inducted into the parish of Zundert, where there were fifty-six Protestants out of a total community of one hundred and fourteen. *Netherlands Reformed Church Community Collection, Etten.*

Etten. The church in which the Reverend Theodorus van Gogh preached is still in existence.

31 *Etten and District*, a pen and ink map by Vincent and Cor van Gogh, Etten, 22 July 1878, $5^{7}/_{8}'' \times 3^{3}/_{4}''$. In the bottom right-hand corner: 'Dit hebben Vincent en ik in 't mastbosch gemaakt van

Cor. Ik moet naar bed goeden nacht.' ('From Cor. This was made by Vincent and me in the fir wood. I must go to bed. Good night.') *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

CORNELIS-VINCENT VAN GOGH was Vincent's youngest brother; he was generally called 'Cor'. He was born on 17 May 1867, in Zundert. After making an unhappy marriage he went to South Africa and joined the Boer Army as a volunteer. His name is one of those on a memorial to the fallen in the Transvaal. *Ds. em. J. P. Scholte-van Houten Collection, Lochem.*

32 *The Rectory at Etten,* 1881, pen and ink, 3 1/2" × 5 1/2". The sketch belonged first to Wilhelmien then to Anna van Gogh. *Private Collection.*

33 KEE VOS-STRICKER. This photograph was taken two or three years after Vincent came to know her in Etten. At that time her son was four; here he is six or seven. *Ds. em. J. P. Scholte-van Houten Collection, Lochem.*

VINCENT'S UNCLE. The Reverend Stricker had married a Carbentus. *Ds. em. J. P. Scholte-van Houten Collection, Lochem.*

34 THE DUTCH PAINTER, Weissenbruch, as he was when Vincent met him in The Hague in 1882.

35 BREITNER, THE PAINTER, made studies of nature and sketched landscapes with Vincent in The Hague.

ANTON MAUVE, who gave Vincent lessons in painting in The Hague in 1882. When he died, Vincent, then in Arles, dedicated his finest picture of that period to him, writing on it the words: '*Souvenir de Mauve*'.

37 *Woman (Sien) and Child,* drawn in The Hague in April 1883. Charcoal, black and white chalk and pencil on tinted paper, 21 1/8" × 13 3/4". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

40/41 *Washing in Scheveningen,* The Hague, July 1882, Water-colour on canvas, 12 5/8" × 21 1/4". Vincent gave this picture as a present to Margo Begeman. *J. Buysman Collection, Noordwijk a. Z.*

42 THE PRESBYTERY AT NUENEN, built in 1776, where Vincent lived with his parents between 1883 and 1885.

43 *The Presbytery at Nuenen,* Autumn 1885, pen and ink, 2 7/8" × 3 7/8". The drawing belonged first to Wilhelmien and then to Anna van Gogh. *Ds. em. Scholte-van Houten Collection, Lochem.*

The Presbytery at Nuenen, Nuenen, Autumn 1885, oil on canvas, 13" × 16 7/8". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

44 'NUNEVILLE', meaning simply 'the town of Nuenen', was the name of the Begeman's house, near the Presbytery in Nuenen. It was restored at the same time as the Presbytery and bought by the van Gogh foundation.

MARGO BEGEMAN, to whom Vincent gave several of his pictures as presents, among them the water-colour reproduced on pp. 40–41.

45 THE WATERMILL NEAR NUENEN, as Vincent knew it, is still standing.

The Watermill, Nuenen, November 1884, oil on canvas, 17 3/4" × 22 7/8". Comparison with the photograph of the same mill shows that this is a typical example of Vincent's personal interpretation of reality. The steps, far left, have since been removed. *Tabingh Suermondt, Collection, Velp.*

46 *The Protestant Church at Nuenen,* January 1884, oil on canvas, 16 1/8" × 12 5/8". Vincent painted this picture for his mother, who was confined to bed after an accident.

PHOTOGRAPH OF THE SAME CHURCH. A few years ago the Protestant community removed several old trees and a hedge which had surrounded the site.

47 APROPOS *The Potato-Eaters,* Vincent wrote to Theo: 'I have tried hard to paint in such a way that the spectator is immediately struck by the idea that these people, eating potatoes in the lamplight, dug them up with the same hands with which they are now taking them out of the dish; that they are real workers; that they have literally earned their food.'

48 SCHAFRATH, a Catholic verger, who allowed Vincent to stay in his house.

SCHAFRATH'S HOUSE AT NUENEN. After several quarrels with his father, Vincent left the Presbytery where he had been making his studies of peasants. He moved into Schafrath's house and set up a small workroom for himself. There he created *The Potato-Eaters.*

49 *The Potato-Eaters,* Nuenen, April 1885, oil, canvas on wood, 28 3/8" × 36 5/8" (see note to p. 47).

50/51 *Birds' Nests,* Nuenen, October 1885, oil on canvas, 15 1/8" × 18 3/8". Vincent wrote to Theo: 'I am now working on still-lifes of my birds' nests, of which I have finished four.' For him, birds' nests had a symbolic meaning. Years later, when his brother, Theo, his sister-in-law, Jo, and their son visited him in Auvers, he gave the baby a present—a bird's nest. *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

52 *The Station in Eindhoven,* Nuenen, 1884, oil on canvas, 5 7/8" × 10 1/4". This painting remained in the possession of Anton Kerssemakers, to whom Vincent gave it. The old station is no longer in existence; in its place stands a memorial to Philips. *Private Collection.*

53 KERSSEMAKERS sitting in front of his easel in his studio, from which Vincent painted the Eindhoven station in the snow. Eindhoven is nearly four miles from Nuenen.

54 POSTCARD TO HERR A. KERSSEMAKERS SIMONIS. The message reads: 'Dear Sir, I do not know whether I shall be able to come and paint on Saturday—for I am making a few studies of potato planting, and I may have to work on them on the day in question. But if not Saturday, I shall come on Monday, providing you confirm this. Yours sincerely, Vincent.'

55 *The Potato-Eaters,* Nuenen, April 1885, lithograph, 10 1/2" × 11 7/8". This print was made in the Gestel printing works in Eindhoven after the second version of the picture and was meant to be the first of a series of lithographs dealing with peasant life.

LITHOGRAPH WORKS IN EINDHOVEN. In this studio, now no longer in existence, Vincent drew *The Potato-Eaters* on the lithographic stone for printing.

56 VINCENT'S LODGINGS IN ANTWERP. He had a back room on the second floor in this house, 224 Lange Beeldekenstraat. According to the numbering of that time it was 194.

'DEAR THEO, This is just to tell you that I am in Antwerp and that I have seen various things. I have rented a little

room in the Rue des Images, No. 194, over a colourman's for twenty-five francs a month.'

57 *Het Steen*, drawing, Antwerp, December 1885, ink and coloured chalk, 5 1/8" × 8 1/4". Vincent drew this remarkable historical building at a time when the fairway round it was being enlarged. *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

PHOTOGRAPH OF HET STEEN, dating from roughly the same period as Vincent's drawing.

*59 *Girl from a Café-Chantant*, profile, Antwerp, December 1885, oil on canvas, 23 5/8" × 19 5/8". Apropos of this picture, Vincent wrote to Theo: 'When I received the money I immediately engaged a beautiful model and painted a life-size head from her. It is very light, except for the black hair. Nevertheless, the colour of the head stands out from the background, to which I tried to give a golden lustre.... The subject is a girl from a café-chantant but I was trying to catch something of the "ecce homo" in the expression.' *Alfred Wyler Collection, New York.*

60 ANTWERP. This photograph was taken in 1955. Since Vincent drew the scene in 1885, the call, serrated gables have been restored to the two end houses.

61 *Market-Place*, Antwerp, 18 December 1885, black and coloured chalk on Ingres, 8 1/8" × 11 3/4". The middle building, which was called the Winkler house at the time, accommodated a sketching club from eight until ten in the evening. Vincent joined the club after he entered the Antwerp Academy.

62 THE CERTIFICATE OF ADMISSION issued by the Antwerp Academy. It reads: 'No. 61. Royal Academy of Art, Antwerp. Winter Term 1885–1886. Certificate of admission. M. van Gogh, Vincent, is enrolled as a student of the Academy and member of the Classical class. Antwerp, 18 January 1886, The Director, Ph. Rombouts.'

63 MAIN ENTRANCE OF THE ANTWERP ACADEMY, used by the senior classes.

SIDE ENTRANCE OF THE ACADEMY, used by the beginners' classes, to which Vincent was finally demoted.

64 PORTRAIT OF VAN GOGH by H. M. Levens, an Englishman. Apparently the original, a water-colour, has been lost. It has not been seen since it was included in a van Gogh number of the Flemish paper *Van Nu en Straks* by Professor Henri van de Velde, in 1893. This was the first portrait of Vincent by another painter.

65 To THEO: '"Nil desperandum" is a good motto. I think Antwerp is beautiful and have taken several walks through the town; along the quays it is wonderful. Well, anyway–it can do no harm to get to know Antwerp, etc. Best wishes, write soon to your Vincent.' Notice the difference in handwriting between the beginning and end of the letter (see also p. 56).

66 54 RUE LEPIC. This was the place where Vincent lived, with Theo, for the greater part of his stay in Paris, from June 1886 until February 1888, when he left for Arles. He had arrived in the capital on 1 March 1886 and at the beginning they lived in Theo's previous lodgings in the rue Laval.

67 *View from van Gogh's Room, rue Lepic*, oil on canvas, 18 1/8" × 15", *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.* Vincent also

painted another, almost identical, view of the same scene and gave the painting to his new friend, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec.

68 PHOTOGRAPH OF THEO VAN GOGH, dating from Vincent's stay in Paris.

WILHELMIEN, Vincent's sister, was nine years younger than he. Born in 1862, she was twenty-six when she came to Paris. She, too, had artistic talents and drew well. Vincent sent her a whole series of letters which were published in the Jubilee Edition of the Collected Letters. A few years after Vincent's death, she too had to enter a mental hospital where she died at an advanced age.

69 *Boulevard de Clichy*, Paris, 1887, oil on canvas, 18 1/4" × 15 1/8". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.* The Boulevard de Clichy is only a few minutes walk away from 54 rue Lepic. During his stay in Paris, Vincent painted it from a spot diagonally opposite the present Moulin Rouge, which was not built at that time, as his pictures show. *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

MODERN PHOTOGRAPH of the Boulevard de Clichy.

70 THE BRIDGE OF CHATOU as it is today. It has been altered since 1887 when Vincent painted it.

71 *Le Pont de Chatou*, Paris, 1887, oil on canvas, 20 1/2" × 25 5/8". *Mme. Ch. Bührle Collection, Zürich.* A comparison between the picture and the reality shows that Vincent introduced improvements when his aesthetic taste demanded it.

72 *The Window at Bataille's*, a drawing, Paris, 1887, pen and ink and coloured chalk, 21 1/16" × 15 1/2". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

'CHEZ BATAILLE', the little restaurant where the van Goghs and Theo's future brother-in-law, André Bonger, usually had their meals, is now a greengrocer's shop.

73 *Montmartre*, Paris, 1887, oil on canvas, 22" × 24 3/8". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.* In *Gardens on the Butte Montmartre*, Vincent painted the same subject from a different angle.

74 ONE OF THE FEW remaining corners of Montmartre which have retained their original character.

*75 *Le Moulin de la Galette*, Paris, 1886, oil on canvas, 14 5/8" × 17 3/4". *National Gallery, Berlin.*

76 *Self-portrait* by Gauguin, Brittany, 1888, oil an canvas, 16 7/8" × 21 1/4". Bottom right: 'les misérables à l'ami Vincent. P. Gauguin 88'; top right: a portrait in profile of Emile Bernard. Vincent wrote to Theo: 'I have just received Gauguin's self-portrait and Bernard's self-portrait with Gauguin's portrait in the background and vice versa. The Gauguin is remarkable but I like the Bernard better. . . .' *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

77 *Self-portrait* by Bernard, 1888, oil on canvas, 18 1/8" × 21 5/8". Top right: '*Emile Bernard à son copaing Vincent.*' In the background a full-face portrait of Gauguin in a beret. Vincent wrote: 'They did the portraits specially for me. I was against the idea: I considered these paintings too valuable to exchange. Bernard wrote and said I must take it in any case; his letter is very flattering, more than I deserve.' *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

78 *Portrait of van Gogh* by Toulouse-Lautrec, Paris, 1886, pastel, 21 1/4" × 17 3/4". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

Portrait of van Gogh by John P. Russell, Paris, 1886, oil on canvas, 23 5/8" × 17 3/4". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

79 *Gate with Flag*, 1887, ink, pencil, water-colour and body-colour, 12 1/4" × 9 1/2". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

80 *Le Père Tanguy*, oil on canvas, 18 1/2" × 15 1/8". In the background Japanese woodcuts; bottom right, Kesai Yeisen's 'Orian'. *Musée Rodin, Paris.*

The Actor (after Kesai Yeisen), Paris, 1888, oil on canvas, 41 3/8" × 24". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

81 *The Bridge* (after Hiroshige), Paris, 1888, oil on canvas, 28 3/4" × 21 1/8". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

Plum Trees in Blossom (after Hiroshige), Paris, 1888, oil on canvas, 21 5/8" × 18 1/8". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

82/3 Map of Arles, 1956.

85 The Yellow House. Vincent occupied the right-hand half of 2 Place Lamartine, a gabled building whose ground floor was later converted into a *Bar à Tabac*. In the last war the whole house was destroyed by bombing.

Van Gogh's House at Arles, Arles, May 1888, water-colour and pen, 9 5/8" × 12". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

86 *Van Gogh's Room* in the Yellow House, painted in Saint-Rémy-en-Provence in September 1889, oil on canvas, 28 3/4" × 36 1/4". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

87 *Café Terrace at Night*, Arles, September 1888, oil on canvas, 31 7/8" × 25 3/4". Vincent wrote to Theo: 'The second [picture] shows a café seen from the street, with a terrace lit by a large gas lamp, in blue darkness, with a piece of starry blue sky. . . .' *Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum, Otterlo.*

88 *Washerwomen*, Arles, Summer 1888, pen, 12 5/8" × 9 1/2". 'You remember the little drawing of a wooden bridge with washerwomen on a boat, and a town in the background.' *Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum, Otterlo.*

La Roubine du Roy. This was the subject of a painting and several drawings. The primitive wooden foot-bridge over the canal and the wooden platforms for the washerwomen on the right bank have disappeared; in front of the tall chimney in Vincent's drawing there is now a large gasometer.

89 *Hovels at Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer*, reed-pen, 11 7/8" × 18 1/2". Vincent told Theo: 'I have three more drawings of cottages which I will send on, but at the moment I still need them. The cottages are a little unskilful, but I have some more careful drawings.'

Boats on the Beach, Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer, June ,1888, oil on canvas, 25 5/8" × 31 7/8". 'I am sending you drawings of Saintes-Maries by the same post. Early this morning, shortly before my departure, I did the drawing of the boats and I am still working on the painting from it.' *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

90/1 *View of Arles*, April 1888, oil on canvas, 28 3/8" × 36 5/8". The vertical lines of the treetrunks cut through the whole composition from top to bottom, as in the picture of Les Alyscamps which he painted a few months later (see p. 97) and in which this daring effect, here used by van Gogh for the first time, is

undoubtedly influenced by the Japanese colour-prints. This picture, which Vincent sent to Theo from Saint-Rémy-de-Provence in July 1889, was hung in the 'The Twenty' exhibition in Brussels, 1890. *Bavarian State Collection, Munich.*

92 MONTMAJOUR. Photograph taken from exactly the same spot from which Vincent executed his drawing.

THE RUINS AT MONTMAJOUR. He wrote to Theo: 'Today I have sent you a few drawings and I now add two more. They are views of a rocky hill from which you can see the Crau [a vine-growing area], the town of Arles and the district of Fontvielles.'

93 *Crag,* July 1888, pen and pencil, 19 1/4" × 24". 'I have come back from Montmajour where I spent a day and the lieutenant kept me company. . . .' *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

Montmajour, near Arles, May 1888, red ink and black chalk, 12 1/4" × 18 5/8". *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

94 A LETTER TO PAUL SIGNAC, dating probably from the first half of April 1889, in which Vincent inserted two sketches of his most recent paintings.

95 *The Postman Roulin,* Arles, August 1888, oil on canvas, 31 1/2" × 25 1/4". At the beginning of August, Vincent wrote to Theo: 'Just now I am working from a new model. An official in a blue uniform with gold trimmings, with a large, bearded face, very socratic, an inveterate Republican like Père Tanguy; a more interesting man than most.' *Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*

Portrait of Armand Roulin, Arles, November 1888, oil on canvas, 25 5/8" × 21 1/4". The model was the sixteen-year-old son of the postman, Roulin. *Folkwang Museum, Essen.*

96 *Portrait of Lieutenant Milliet,* Arles, September 1888, oil on canvas, 33 5/8" × 19 1/4". Vincent wrote to Theo: 'I would be glad if he [Milliet] were a better model; but in any case his face, with its pale, dull complexion and the red képi against the emerald background, makes a fine subject.' *Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum, Otterlo.*

97 VINCENT PAINTED LES ALYSCAMPS, a scene not far from the centre of Arles, from several different positions. This photograph is taken from the same angle as his most successful rendering of the subject, *Les Alyscamps in Autumn.*

Les Alyscamps in Autumn, Arles, November 1888, oil on canvas, 28" × 35 7/8". One of the first pictures painted after Gauguin's arrival in Arles. Les Alyscamps (name derived from the Latin *Elysii Campi)* was originally a pagan graveyard, and later one of the most famous graveyards in Christendom, hymned by Dante and Ariosto. After its destruction in the previous century, only an avenue lined on both sides with stone coffins remained. *Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum, Otterlo.*

99 *Vincent painting Sunflowers,* Arles, November 1888, oil on canvas, 28 3/4" × 35 7/8". This portrait was painted by Gauguin, whom Vincent had first met in Paris and who lived and worked with him in the Yellow House in Arles from 20 October to 24 December. Vincent wrote to Theo: 'He is now working on a portrait of me, which I do not consider one of his most promising works . . .' (November 1888). And later (10 September 1889) '. . . he has caught me exactly as I was then. A man loaded with electricity.' *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

100 *Le Forum Republicain*, a weekly paper catering for the Arles district, appeared every Sunday. This article in the issue of 30 December 1888 (No. 53 of the 24th year) reads, under the heading: 'Local News': 'Last Sunday at 11.30 in the evening Vincent Vaugogh [*sic*] a painter of Dutch origin, called at the brothel No. 1, asked for a woman called Rachel and handed her ... his ear, saying: "Guard this object with your life." Then he disappeared. When informed of this action, which could only be that of a pitiful madman, the police went the next day to his house and discovered him lying in bed, apparently at the point of death. The unfortunate man has been rushed to hospital.' *Central Library, Arles.*

101 Dr Rey. Vincent made the acquaintance of the doctor while he was ill in hospital and later, after the first attack was over, painted a remarkable portrait of him.

102 *The Garden of the Hospital at Arles*, Spring 1889, oil on canvas, 28 3/4" × 36 1/4". Vincent told Theo: '... the garden is even more colourful in the evening'. *Oscar Reinhart Collection, Winterthur.*

103 Photograph of the hospital garden at Arles, taken from the same position as Vincent's painting.

Vincent's bedstead. Until three years ago, it still stood in the cell for dangerous patients in Arles hospital. As is shown, the bedstead was attached to the wall and floor. When necessary, patients were tied in with straps fastened to the rings and passed through the apertures.

104 *Portrait with Severed Ear*, Arles, February 1889, oil on canvas, 20 1/8" × 17 3/4". Painted shortly after Vincent had injured his ear, when he was still wearing a bandage round his head. *Mr and Mrs Leigh B. Block Collection, Chicago.*

105 *La Berceuse* (Madame Roulin), Arles, finished in March 1889, oil on canvas, 35 3/8" × 28". The portrait shows the wife of the postman, Roulin, with whose family Vincent was friendly. There are four earlier portraits of Madame Roulin. In this one she is seated behind a cradle and holds the strap in her hands. The work is one of a series of five which van Gogh began during Gauguin's visit. *Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum, Otterlo.*

107 The entrance hall of the asylum. This is the scene that Vincent represented in his water-colour.

The Open Door, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, 1889, water-colour and body-colour on pink Ingres paper, 22 7/8" × 17 5/8". The picture shows the doorway of the hospital with a view on o the fountain. *V. W. van Gogh Collection, Laren.*

108 Photograph of the view painted by Vincent in the hospital grounds.

Hospital Grounds at Saint-Rémy, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, October 1889, oil on canvas, 28 3/4" × 36 1/4". *Folkwang Museum, Essen.*

109 *The Garden of the Asylum at Saint-Rémy*, oil on canvas, 37 3/8" × 29 3/4". Bottom right: 'Vincent'. *Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum, Otterlo.*

This photograph shows all the details included in Vincent's picture. Note the windows in the background.

110 Vincent's cell in Saint-Rémy. The chair and bedstead date from Vincent's time.

111 The asylum, from the South. The arrow indicates Vincent's cell.

112 View from Vincent's cell. This scene, often painted by Vincent, was in reality obscured by heavy bars, as shown.

112/13 *The Fenced Field*, Saint-Rémy, March–April 1890, oil on canvas, 28″×35 7/8″. Vincent referred to this work (November 1889) *as Champ de blé au soleil levant. Kröller-Müller Rijksmuseum Otterlo.*

114 The baths. Contemporary documents show that the main treatment for nervous diseases consisted of curative baths.

115 *The Roadmenders*, Saint-Rémy, November 1889, oil on canvas, 29 1/8″×36 5/8″. *Museum of Art, Cleveland.*

The boulevard portrayed in Vincent's *Roadmenders* is still largely unchanged.

116 Vincent's lodgings in Auvers-sur-Oise. This restaurant, where Vincent spent the last months of his life, is now called after him.

117 *Portrait of Dr Gachet*, Auvers-sur-Oise, June 1890, oil on canvas, 37″×29 1/8″. *S. Kramarsky Collection, New York.*

Photograph of Dr Gachet taken during the period when Vincent was connected with him.

118 Dr Gachet's house, where Vincent painted portraits of both the doctor and his daughter. The house was frequented by several other painters who achieved world fame, including Cézanne. Dr Gachet himself drew, painted and etched.

119 *Mademoiselle Gachet at the Piano*, Auvers-sur-Oise, June 1890, oil on canvas, 19 5/8″×24 3/4″. Vincent wrote to Theo: 'Yesterday and the day before I worked on a picture of Mademoiselle Gachet. Her dress is pink, the background green with orange spots; the red carpet is spotted with green and the piano is dark purple.' *Kunstmuseum, Basle.*

120 The Zundert Town Hall is not unlike its counterpart in Auvers-sur-Oise. The former stood opposite the van Gogh house and was probably one of the first things he ever saw. The latter was probably one of the last.

The Town Hall, Auvers. Both these photographs were taken in 1956; the two buildings are unaltered.

121 *The Town Hall at Auvers on Bastille Day*, July 1890, 28 3/8″×36 5/8″. *Mr and Mrs Leigh B. Block Collection, Chicago.*

122 Johanna van Gogh-Bonger. This picture, originally from Wilhelmien van Gogh's family album and later in the possession of Anna van Houten, *née* van Gogh, shows Jo(hanna) van Gogh-Bonger at about the period when she, Theo and their four-month-old son visited Vincent at Dr Gachet's. The child was called Vincent-Willem after his godfather uncle.

Theo, as he looked at the time of his marriage to Johanna Bonger, André's sister.

123 *L'Echo Pontoisien*, 70th year, no. 32, Thursday, 7 August 1890, p. 2: 'On Sunday, 27th July, one van Gogh, 37 years old, shot himself with a gun in the fields and, since he was only wounded, was taken back to his rooms where he died two days later.'

Letter to Albert Aurier, a French writer, from Saint-Rémy, February 1890. It runs: 'Be assured that your article would have been more correct, and to

my mind, more to the point if in dealing with the problems of the future, "tropical painting", and the problem of colour, you had concentrated on Gauguin and Monticelli, before mentioning me. For my part in the solution of these problems was, I assure you, very small.' *J. Williame Collection, Chateauroux, France.*

124 DEATH CERTIFICATE. 'On the twenty-ninth day of July eighteen hundred and ninety at ten o'clock a.m. died Vincent van Gogh, artist, unmarried, thirty-seven years of age, born on March the thirtieth, one thousand eight hundred and fifty-three at Groot Zundert, Holland, deceased today at half past one in the morning in the house of M. Ravoux, hotelier, in this parish of Auvers-sur-Oise, where he was living at the time. No permanent domicile; son of Theodore van Gogh, deceased, and of Anna Cornelia Carbentus, living at Leyden, Holland.' The document was witnessed by Theo and Vincent's landlord, Arthur Gustav Ravoux. *Archives of Auvers-sur-Oise, Register of Deaths, 1890, No. 60.*

125 THE ATTIC ROOM in which Vincent died after having shot himself two days before. The bed is modern.

126 *The Plain near Auvers,* July 1890, oil on canvas, $28^{7}/_{8}'' \times 36^{1}/_{4}''$. Neue Staatsgalerie, *Munich.* This was certainly one of the last landscapes he painted.

127 VINCENT'S AND THEO'S GRAVES lie side by side in the Auvers churchyard to which Theo's widow had his body removed in 1914, so that, in death as in life, the brothers could be united. The simple inscriptions read: 'Here lies Vincent van Gogh 1853–1890' and 'Here lies Théodore van Gogh 1857–1891'.

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